

NATIONAL COLLEGE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Thank you Tony for that kind introduction.

And thank you all, for the work that you do.

The service you give, the leadership you show, the example you set - they are all inspiring.

And they are what make my work worthwhile.

The wonderful thing about my job is the opportunity it gives me to see the very best of this country - young people achieving more than they ever thought they could, finding their special talent, taking charge of their own destinies, becoming authors of their own life stories.

Seeing the work you do - often against the odds, in difficult circumstances, with tight resources and challenging intakes - reaffirms one of my deepest convictions - there is no way to spend your life which is more admirable than following the vocation which inspires all of you - the calling to teach.

And there is no way I can do this job without listening to you as you explain what drives you, what your ambitions are for the children and young people are in your care, and what Government can do to serve you.

Which is why I was so glad to hear what Steve had to say - because the political leadership I want to provide is all about service. It should be Government's job to help, serve and support you - not direct, patronise and fetter you.

I believe that heads and teachers are the best people to run schools - not politicians or bureaucrats.

The people from whom I have learnt the most while in politics have been head teachers - people like Fiona Hammans at Banbury School, Joan McVittie at Woodside High, Mike Wilshaw at Mossbourne Community Academy, Mike Griffiths

at Northampton School for Boys, Mike Spinks at Urmston Grammar, Sue John at Lamport School, Patricia Sowter at Cuckoo Hall, Sally Coates at Burlington Danes, and so many more.

At the heart of this Government's vision for education is a determination to give school leaders more power and control. Not just to drive improvement in their own schools - but to drive improvement across our whole education system.

Looking back over the last fifteen years there are any number of things I could criticise - but I won't - instead I want to celebrate the gains which have been made - and one of the most important is the development and deepening of culture in which we recognise that it is professionals, not bureaucratic strategies and initiatives, which drive school improvement.

Teachers grow as professionals by allowing their work to be observed by other professionals, and observing the very best in their field, in turn.

Head teachers improve their schools fastest and most effectively by working with other heads who have been on that journey. And both sides gain from the collaboration. Mentoring others is often the best form of professional development.

The whole culture of the National College under Steve has been informed by this vision of system-led leadership that taps into the profound moral purpose of the profession, which is why I am so grateful to him - and especially admiring of what has been achieved by all of you who are National Leaders of Education.

MORAL PURPOSE

But admiring as I am of what has been achieved I am, frankly, impatient for us all, as a nation, to do better.

Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a moral crusade or it is nothing. Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party's history, I believe that we have to ensure there is a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government's education policy. Or we will forfeit our mandate.

Unless we are guided by moral purpose in this coalition government then we will squander the goodwill the British people have, so generously, shown us.

And the ethical imperative of our education policy is quite simple - we have to make opportunity more equal.

We have to overcome the deep, historically entrenched, factors which keep so many in poverty, which deprive so many of the chance to shape their own destiny, which have made us the sick man of Europe when it comes to social mobility.

It is a unique sadness of our times that we have one of the most stratified and segregated school systems in the developed world.

We know, from Leon Feinstein's work, that low ability children from rich families overtake high ability children from poor families during primary school.

And the gap grows as the children get older. A child eligible to free school meals is half as likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A*–C, including English and maths, than a child from a wealthier background.

By 18 the gap is vast. In the most recent year for which we have data, out of 80,000 young people eligible for free school meals, just 45 made it to Oxbridge. That's fewer than some private schools manage by themselves.

We are clearly, as a nation, still wasting talent on a scale which is scandalous. It is a moral failure, an affront against social justice which we have to put right.

And that is why I am so glad that at the heart of our Coalition's programme for Government is a commitment to spending more on the education of the poorest. The pupil premium - supported by Conservatives but championed with special passion and developed in detail by our Liberal Democrat partners - is a policy designed to address disadvantage at root. By giving resources to the people who matter most in extending opportunity – school leaders and teachers.

And far from difficult economic times being a reason to scale down our ambitions, the economic challenges we face are only reason to accelerate our reform programme.

Because the days are long gone - if they ever existed - when we could afford to educate a minority of our children well while hoping the rest were being schooled adequately.

Already China and India are turning out more engineers, more computer scientists and more university graduates than the whole of Europe and America combined.

And the success of other nations in harnessing their intellectual capital is a function of their determination to develop world-beating education systems. Across the globe other nations are outpacing us - pulling ahead in international comparisons, driving innovation, changing their systems to give professionals more freedom to grow, adapt, improve and learn from each other...

It is no longer enough, if it ever was, to say we as a nation are doing better than we did in the past. As Matt Ridley's wonderful new book *Rational Optimism* shows, in almost every field of human endeavour we are doing exponentially better than we did in the past. The real test is how are we doing compared to the rest. And in particular, how are we doing compared to the best...

LEARNING FROM OVERSEAS

We have to ask ourselves how our sixteen-year-olds are doing relative to sixteen-year olds in Scandinavia, Singapore, Canada and Australasia.

Unless we learn from those nations which are innovating most imaginatively and successfully then we will be failing in our duty to the young people who are in our care while we hold office.

And the pace of change across the globe is accelerating. Many of those nations which are now the world's strongest performers, from Finland to South Korea, were well behind us in levels of educational achievement a generation ago. Now they put us to shame.

Twenty years ago we were 14th in the world when nations were measured on how well they educated their teenagers. Now we are 23rd.

In English, Maths and Science, the figures from the most respected international comparisons also show us falling behind other nations.

For the fourth-largest economy in the world, with a much higher than average level of investment in education and some of the most talented professionals anywhere in the globe, this performance simply isn't good enough.

But while the comparisons are sobering, the reasons to be optimistic are plentiful. Indeed most of them are in this room.

If you look at the most successful education systems in the world – those with the best absolute performance – and those with the highest levels of equity across classes – they all tend to have certain common features.

They extend a high level of autonomy to individual schools.

School leaders are empowered to innovate in their own schools

And they are expected to lead the drive for improvement in other schools.

The political leadership is uncompromising in the drive for higher standards.

There is a culture of high expectations which does not allow excuses to be made for poor performance on the basis of class, ethnicity or background.

There is a proper national framework of accountability.

Which includes the transparent publication of academic performance on a school-by-school basis with proper, externally set and marked, testing

And an inspection regime which is very light touch for high performing institutions so the real focus can be on under-performance.

Teaching is a high status profession which draws its recruits from among the highest performing graduates.

There is a strong culture of professional development which encourages teachers to improve their craft by learning from others while also deepening their academic knowledge.

All of these features – which characterise the best education systems in the world – are present in England. But not to the degree we require to keep pace with the world's best.

Indeed, over the last three years I fear Government action has held our education system back from making many of the advances we needed to make to keep pace with the best.

Ministers decreased school autonomy, tried to drive improvement through bureaucratic compliance, complicated the inspection regime and simultaneously weakened and complicated our system of accountability.

The prospect of radical reform along the lines of the world's best education systems, envisaged in the 2005 Education White Paper, was never fulfilled.

And while we rowed back on reform, the pace of change in other nations accelerated.

In America, President Obama is pressing ahead with radical school reform to close the gap between rich and poor. He has offered extra support to programmes designed to attract more great people into teaching and leadership, as well as encouraging states to provide greater accountability to parents and welcome new providers into state education.

He has insisted - along with other Democrat reformers like Arne Duncan, Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee – that there be more great Charter schools – the equivalent of our Academies– to drive up attainment, especially among the poorest. In New York, Charter schools – like the inspirational Knowledge is Power Programme schools - have dramatically narrowed the vast performance gap between black and white children and 91% of those benefitting are on free or reduced price meals.

With a relentless focus on traditional subjects, a culture of no excuses, tough discipline, personalised pastoral care and enthusiastic staff who work free from Government bureaucracy to help every child succeed, these schools are amazing engines of social mobility that are now sending children from ghetto areas to elite universities.

In Canada, and specifically in Alberta, schools have also been liberated, given the autonomy enjoyed by charter schools in the US. Head teachers control their own budgets, set their own ethos and shape their own environments.

In Calgary and Edmonton, a diverse range of autonomous schools offer professionals freedom and parents choice.

And the result?

Alberta now has the best performing state schools of any English-speaking regions.

In Sweden, the old bureaucratic monopoly that saw all state schools run by local government was ended and the system opened up to allow new, non-selective, state schools to be set up by a range of providers.

It has allowed greater diversity, increased parental choice and has seen results improve – with results improving fastest of all in the areas where schools exercised the greatest degree of autonomy and parents enjoyed the widest choice.

Finland is often deliberately contrasted with Sweden because of the supposed rigidity of its education system.

But by placing a premium on specialism, diversity and parental choice within that framework, they too are driving up standards.

In Singapore, again often held up as a model of regimented Prussian-style centralism, dramatic leaps in attainment have been secured by schools where principals are exercising a progressively greater degree of operational autonomy. The Government has deliberately encouraged greater diversity in the schools system and as the scope for innovation has grown, so Singapore's competitive advantage over other nations has grown too.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

It is these examples – and these lessons – that explains our philosophical approach to education perhaps better than anything.

The most important people in driving school improvement aren't inspectors, advisers, school improvement partners or Ministers.

It is teachers and school leaders.

And that is why I am passionate about extending the freedoms denied to you by the last government.

One of the first things we have done is give professionals more scope to drive improvement by inviting all schools to consider applying for academy freedoms.

This is an addition to, rather than replacement of the existing academies programmes. We will continue to ensure that academies are used to drive faster and deeper improvements in deprived and disadvantaged areas.

But we will now also provide you with the kind of autonomy that has served schools in America, Canada, Sweden and Finland so well and allow all schools the freedom to develop their own curriculum and fully control their own budget and staffing.

Since I issued my invitation to schools three weeks ago, I have been overwhelmed by the response.

More than one thousand seven hundred and seventy-two schools have enquired about academy freedoms.

870 outstanding schools – including 405 secondary schools and more than 400 outstanding primaries have contacted us – and will lead the way.

That's 70% of the outstanding secondary schools in the country and a significant cohort of outstanding primaries.

I know some have expressed concern that this offer of greater autonomy for schools will work against the collaborative model of school improvement that has grown up over the past fifteen or so years and which has done so much to tackle under-

performance in those schools in the most challenging circumstances.

Let me be clear: I would not be going down this road if I thought it would in any way set back the process of school improvement, if would in any way undermine the progress we need to make in our weakest or most challenged schools or if it would in any way fracture the culture of collaboration which has driven school improvement over the last decade.

This policy is driven, like all our education policy, by our guiding moral purpose – the need to raise attainment for all children and close the gap between the richest and poorest.

I believe this policy will only work if it strengthens the bonds between schools and leads to a step-change in system-led leadership.

That is why I will expect of every school that acquires academy freedoms that it partners at least one other school to help drive improvement across the board.

That is why I envisage a bigger role for the National College and the programme of National Leaders of Education in brokering and providing support from great schools for those who need help to improve.

And that is why any school which acquires academy freedoms will continue to be governed by admissions rules which guarantee fair access to all, safeguards the inclusive character of comprehensive schools, ensures all schools take their fair share of pupils in need and prevents any school discriminating in any way against those pupils with special educational needs.

Within the safeguards provided by these assurances I believe innovation can flourish. New approaches to the curriculum, to assessment, to discipline and behaviour, to pastoral care, to careers guidance, to sport, the arts and music, new ways of gathering data on pupil performance, new ways of supporting teachers to improve their practice, new ways of tackling

entrenched illiteracy and the tragic culture of low expectations which blights so many white working class communities.

And this culture of innovation, I believe, has the potential to benefit all our children.

Earlier this month, Mike Gibbons of the Richard Rose Federation, wrote an article for the TES which encapsulated my vision.

More autonomous schools, he wrote, had in the past been

“...perceived as ‘educational lifeboats’ to allow highly capable and driven parents to leave the main system.”

But, he argued, that the move to greater autonomy could in fact move our schools system in the opposite direction. More autonomous schools could, should, and in my view will, be

“tugboats adding extra ‘pull’ to the drive to increase universal standards, not innovations dragging much-needed resources away from the fleet.”

He then concluded by saying that:

“If we can develop schools to become crucibles of innovation on behalf of the whole system, working for the sake of all children as well as meeting the needs of parents who are seeking different provision, then the sum continues to be greater than the parts. And so every school, regardless of its status, works for itself and for the whole system.”

Mike is himself another example of an inspirational school leader.

He is also, of course, spot on.

Whole system improvement, a comprehensive approach to driving up standards for every child, is what the coalition Government aims to deliver.

Central to that drive is structural reform of the kind I've laid out – professionals liberated to drive improvement across the system.

IMPROVING TEACHING

But the success of that model is not the only example of good practice here in England we want to spread more widely, it's not the only lesson from abroad we want to implement more urgently here.

We also want to take urgent action to attract more great teachers into the classroom. We want to further enhance the prestige and esteem of the teaching profession and further improve teacher training and continuous professional development.

Look at the highest performing nations in any measure of educational achievement and they are always, but always, those with the most highly qualified teachers. Whether its Singapore, South Korea or Finland, as Sir Michael Barber has pointed out in his ground-breaking study for McKinsey nothing matters more in education than attracting the best people into teaching and making sure that every minute in the classroom is spent with children benefiting from the best possible instruction.

The generation of teachers currently in our schools is the best ever, but given the pace of international improvement we must always be striving to do better.

That is why we will expand organisations such as Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders which have done so much to attract more highly talented people into education.

That is why we will write off the student loan payments of science and maths graduates who go into teaching.

That is why we will reform teacher recruitment to ensure there is a relentless focus on tempting the best into this, most rewarding, of careers.

And that is why we will reform teacher training to shift trainee teachers out of college and into the classroom.

We will end the arbitrary bureaucratic rule which limits how many teachers can be trained in schools, shift resources so that more heads can train teachers in their own schools, and make it easier for people to shift in mid-career into teaching.

Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom. Which is why I also intend to abolish those rules which limit the ability of school leaders to observe teachers at work. Nothing should get in the way of making sure we have the best possible cadre of professionals ready to inspire the next generation.

And that is why I will also reform the rules on discipline and behaviour to protect teachers from abuse, from false allegations, from disruption and violence. The biggest single barrier to good people starting, or staying, in education is poor pupil behaviour and we need a relentless focus on tackling this issue. That means getting parents to accept their responsibilities, giving teachers the discretion they need to get on with the job and sending a clear and consistent message at all times that adult authority has to be respected if every child is to have their chance.

As well as giving teachers more control over their classrooms I want to give them more control over their careers, developing a culture of professional development which sees more teachers acquiring postgraduate qualifications like masters and doctorates, more potential school leaders acquiring management qualifications and more support in place for those who want, quickly, to climb up the career ladder. In every single one of

these areas the role of the National College will be crucial and I hope we can all work ever more closely together.

Investing in the workforce is one crucial lesson of great education systems, alongside granting your leaders greater autonomy. But there are others which we are also determined to push forward.

MORE INTELLIGENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The best school systems generate rich quantities of data which enable us all to make meaningful comparisons, learn from the best, identify techniques which work and quickly abandon ideologies which don't. In America President Obama, the Gates Foundation, the top charter schools and the principal education reformers all recognise the need for richer, timelier, more in-depth data about performance.

That is why we need to keep rigorous external assessment. Improve and refine our tests, yes, but there can be no going back to the secret garden when public and professionals were in ignorance about where success had taken root and where investment had fallen on stony ground.

Indeed I want to see more data generated by the profession to show what works, clearer information about teaching techniques that get results, more rigorous, scientifically-robust research about pedagogies which succeed and proper independent evaluations of interventions which have run their course. We need more evidence-based policy making, and for that to work we need more evidence.

And that also means a new role for Ofsted. I want to see an inspection regime which also mirrors the approach of the world's most successful systems. Intervention should be in inverse proportion to success. The best needed only the lightest

touch to continue on a course of improvement. Those who are struggling need closer attention. That is why we will direct Ofsted's resources to those schools which are faltering, or coasting, and insist that inspectors spend more time on classroom observation and assessing teaching and learning than having their attention diverted to other, strictly peripheral, areas.

CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS.

There is one other area where I also want us to learn from abroad, indeed to compare ourselves as we have never done before. And that is with our curriculum and qualifications.

I want to ensure our national curriculum is a properly international curriculum – that it reflects the best collective wisdom we have about how children learn, what they should know and how quickly they can grow in knowledge.

I want to use the evidence from those jurisdictions with the best-structured and most successful curricula – from Massachusetts to the Pacific Rim – to inform our curriculum development here.

I want to remove everything unnecessary from a curriculum that has been bent out of shape by the weight of material dumped there for political purposes. I want to prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions of how to teach and how to timetable. Instead I want to arrive at a simple core, informed by the best international practice, which can act as a benchmark against which schools can measure themselves and parents ask meaningful and informed questions about progress.

And alongside curriculum reform informed by evidence I want exam reform sustained by evidence. I want to ensure our qualifications can stand comparison with the most stretching in the world. I want to ensure that the maths tests our eleven year olds sit are comparable with those eleven year olds in Singapore

sit and the science qualifications sixteen or eighteen year olds acquire here are directly comparable with those in Taiwan or Toronto. That is why I want Ofqual to work not just to guarantee exam standards over time, but to guarantee exam standards match the best in the world

CONCLUSION.

I won't deny for a moment this is an ambitious agenda. But I don't think there's any point being in politics, fighting elections, seeking office unless you're ambitious to make a difference.

And if there's any audience I can confess to ambition in front of, it's you. Every day you nurture it, encourage it, celebrate it. You're ambitious for your schools, for the young people in your care, for the students they will become. You want them to be pushed, nudged, cajoled, encouraged, tempted and inspired to do more than they ever thought possible. And you want them to rejoice in knowing they have achieved their full potential.

And that is what I want too. In the relentless drive to help every child achieve everything of which they are capable there can be neither rest nor tranquillity. But there can be the endless satisfaction of seeing the human spirit ennobled and fulfilled. That is the task you have been called to lead. And it is my job to serve you.