
Thanks Lesley – and what a relief that after 3 years someone has finally got the name of the Department right!

I'm delighted to be here this morning for my second ATL annual conference.

I am sorry to have missed Lesley's speech on Monday.

But I know that during it, there was a montage of the many Secretaries of State that Lesley has worked with since she became a teacher, what, was it 20 years ago?

All I can say is that it must either have involved a very big screen or lots of little pictures given the high turnover amongst my predecessors.

And as the second longest serving Secretary of State of since Kenneth Baker and the first Secretary of State to make back-to-back appearances here, let me say how much of a relief it is to me to be here.

Of course, whether I make it three in a row next year rather hangs in the balance.

I do want to pay tribute to the leading role that Mary has played in the social partnership over the past few years.

But the strength of collaboration in the social partnership, which recently marked its 7th anniversary, has been central to the progress that we've made together.

And Mary has played a leading role at the centre of it.

Because whether it's been on:

- compliance with your statutory rights – which she is always extremely quick to remind me aren't optional extras;
- excellent professional development – including getting the roll-out of our Masters programme right;
- and even rarely cover;

she has always challenged us to do the right thing on behalf of her members and we wouldn't have been able to make the progress that we have without her.

So on behalf of the government but also on behalf of the partnership, let me say thank you to Mary.

But I will do as she said and tell you what I stand for.

And I believe that is four things:

- first, it is respecting and trusting the great teachers that we have working in our schools today – and not to relentlessly do down their achievements by pursuing an ideological conflict;
- second, it is inspiring every young person with an engaging curriculum so that they have the chance to get a good qualification – and not to have two-tier education system in which there is excellence for some but not for all;
- third, it is ensuring that every parent has the choice of a good local school – and not just those parents who have the loudest voices or the deepest pockets;
- and finally, it is supporting and empowering schools to drive their own improvement by working together – and not to set schools against schools in a race for pupils.

In each of these areas, we have put in the resources and, by working with you, I believe that we have made real progress.

I remember what it was like in 1997.

I'm sure you'll remember too:

- leaking roofs and freezing classrooms;
- photocopied textbooks;
- demoralised teachers;
- two thirds of young people not making the grade;

- and over half of schools below our basic benchmark.

But I am proud that thanks to your hard work and our investment over the past 13 years, we have:

- built or refurbished over 4,000 school as part of the biggest school building programme since the Victorian era;
- doubled per pupil funding;
- brought in over 40,000 more teachers and over 120,000 more teaching assistants;
- gone from 1 in 2 schools below our basic benchmark to 1 in 12;
- and also gone from 1 in 20 schools having 70% of pupils reaching that same level to 1 in 3 today.

That is a huge transformation.

In part because of our investment.

But as I say whenever I visit a modern new school, buildings are important but they can only take you so far and it's the people in those schools who make the biggest difference.

And that's why above all else, I am also proud to say that:

- we do today have the best school leaders we've ever had – and I would also say that the best school leaders don't work in independent schools but in maintained schools in the state sector;
- and we also have the best generation of teachers we've ever had – and I would say the best teachers in the world.

I know we ask a lot of you.

Our responsibility in government is to put in the resources and to support you.

And I believe that we've made real progress in ensuring that you get the recognition that you deserve and also to give you the powers and space that you need to teach.

That's why the National Agreement is so important.

That's why our extra teaching assistants are so important.

And it's why the clear statutory powers that we gave schools after our Practitioners' Group report in 2005 to discipline children and impose sanctions for breaches of school rules were a big step forward.

In the report that our behaviour adviser, Sir Alan Steer, is publishing today, he says that all schools are now working together in behaviour and attendance partnerships and that schools have all the powers they need to tackle bad behaviour.

But it is also the case that he confirms what Ofsted says about over 80% of secondary schools and 93% of primary schools now having good or outstanding behaviour.

Second, we've made real progress in improving the curriculum.

We've reformed the Key Stage 3 curriculum and provided greater flexibility for head teachers and teachers by ending ended Key Stage 3 tests.

And our Diplomas have been engaging pupils in a new way – and all the reports are that they've been excited by the mixture of academic and vocational learning that means they start by learning the theory, but then go on to also learn about how to apply it in practice.

Third, we've made progress in ensuring that you get the support you need.

The central message in the Children's Plan was that schools can't do it alone and need support from other services and from parents too.

And that's what we're now delivering through Children's Trusts and parenting orders.

Finally, I am proud that while my time as Secretary of State has been all about putting the needs of children and young people first, our schools policy has been founded on getting schools working with schools to drive improvement.

To be honest, we couldn't have done that 13 years ago.

Back then, we needed the centralism of School Improvement Partners and National Strategies to drive the huge improvement that was required.

But because of the progress that we've made and the depth of leadership and teaching that we now have, we can go even further and give you more space and flexibility.

And we're also not yet satisfied.

Because we don't yet have the world-class schools system that I want and I know you want to.

As I said last year, this is about raising standards but it's also about social justice and breaking the longstanding link between deprivation and low attainment that has scarred our country for too long.

And as we look to achieve the vision that we set out in our 21st Century Schools White Paper, what we are doing is going back to the things that we know have worked over the past 13 years and that I've spoken about today and take them to the next level.

So first, I want to go even further to give you the professional support and powers you need to get on and do your jobs.

My ambition is for teachers to have the same standing as lawyers and doctors.

That's why we're making teaching a Masters-level profession.

And it's why we're introducing our license to practice.

I know that you've been debating this point over the past few days.

And from my point of view, it's quite frustrating that I'm only here now at the end of that.

This was one of the subjects that I discussed with a group of ATL members for an hour or so earlier this morning.

We also talked about tackling bad behaviour and what more we can do

to give you the support you need.

In his report today, Sir Alan Steer challenges head teachers to use our Home-School Agreements to ensure that parents and pupils fulfil their responsibilities too.

We are also today announcing the first 20 Lead Behaviour Schools.

They will be funded to work with schools that are performing less well on behaviour – including those whose behaviour is deemed to be satisfactory because that's not good enough when it comes to behaviour.

And we will get to 100 Lead Behaviour Schools by September.

But that's another good example of how we are resourcing schools to lead the system.

Second, we are reforming and updating the primary curriculum to ensure that all children learn the basic skills and knowledge that they need – including through statutory PSHE for all children from the age of 5.

Alongside that, we are guaranteeing one-to-one tuition to all children in primary school and in Year 7 who have fallen behind or are in danger of falling behind.

And we are taking forward our Diplomas so that we can break down the old two-tier divide between excellent academic qualifications for some and second-rate vocational learning for the rest.

Third, the reason that I believe our School Report Card is so important is that it will ensure that parents get all of the information they need but also allow us to break away from the narrow focus on average attainment that league tables provide and recognise all of the things that you do.

Because the truth is that there are schools that are high up in the league tables that frankly aren't doing all that they can to break the link and support the progress of all their pupils.

And there are others that aren't doing so well in the league tables that are doing a brilliant job but don't currently get the recognition they deserve.

Our School Report Card will help us to change that.

And I've also said consistently that while the current system is not set in stone, I believe that scrapping Key Stage 2 tests would be a retrograde step – but the real issue that we should be discussing is actually the accountability system.

Fourth, we've moved a long way from the idea of central school improvement.

With London Challenge, Black Country Challenge and now National Challenge, we've put schools at the heart of school improvement.

And they've all exceeded our expectations.

So we're now also reforming the role of School Improvement Partners and ending National Strategies to give schools more responsibility and freedom to drive their own improvement.

We know that we are going into a tougher spending period.

In the Budget last week, we confirmed real terms rises in funding for Sure Start, 16-19 learning and schools for the next 3 years.

And after paying for 80,000 projected more pupils are taken into account, per pupil funding will still see an annual average increase of 2.1% in 2011-12 and 2012-13 – on top of 4.3% in the coming financial year.

While there will be a need to make efficiencies, I believe that our settlement means that we can:

- deliver our guarantees to parents and to pupils including good discipline in all schools and one-to-one tuition for all children in primary school and Year 7 who fall behind;
- maintain our additional teachers and support staff and keep class sizes down;
- and continue to invest in Building Schools for the Future.

Let me end by making one last point.

In her speech on Monday, Lesley asked an important question.

And that was “what is education?”

She, rightly in my view, said it’s fundamentally about the children.

But let me also say that I believe education must be about every child, not every other child.

It must be about excellence for all, not just for some.

And it can’t just be about some schools, it must be about all schools.

That is the reason that I came into politics in the first place.

That is the reason that I know you’re all here today too.

Of course it is harder for some children and for some young people in some areas because there are additional barriers.

But I know that you and I share a belief that if we come together as a community, we can overcome them.

That is what I have been about and it is what I stand for.

And I look forward to continuing to work with you in the months and years to come to do so.

Thank you.
