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**Chris Harrison, President, National Association of Head
Teachers**

Speech to Annual Conference of the NAHT, Brighton 2011

Good morning to you all!

Colleagues, I know that I am truly privileged to be standing here and making this address and... I have to say to you all that I can only hope to justify the expression of confidence by our membership in electing me to the Presidency of this great association.

Firstly, I have to say a huge thank you to my team of staff back in our school in Suffolk – and, not least, particular thanks must go to my Deputy, Carmel George, because without her support and encouragement over these past years it would never have been possible for me to have taken on the role of Branch Secretary, then to become National Council member for Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and then onto the Vice Presidency last year. I know that I echo the thoughts and feelings of all HTs when I say that it is only with the active support of all those within our schools that we can move the agenda forward in any meaningful and lasting way.... and,

If I am going to thank my staff for their support and for the work they do, day in and day out, then I must also thank my governing body – and, especially the succession of Chairs of Governors - each of whom has always recognised that it is good that HTs should have responsibility beyond the school gate. I thank them all for their support and encouragement.

Many of you here today also give so much of your time to support and enhance the work of the association through your work in our branches, regions and National Executive; work which is always for the benefit of our school leadership members up and down the country. It is your tireless commitment to branches, regions and to your fellow colleagues which promotes the recognised professionalism of NAHT and its valuable contribution to school leadership at all times. I say thank you to all of you for your dedication to the work of this association; and...I particularly want to acknowledge the work of our Life Members who have always been important in maintaining the life and effectiveness of branches and regions alongside the superb support and service provided by those who work directly for NAHT... and,

I would like to thank our team at Haywards Heath – our staff at HQ are experts in understanding the many challenges of school leadership and are passionate about fighting the cause of our members. There are few people in the country who know more about pensions, terms and conditions,

safeguarding, equality, academies, school financing... There are none who have better protected the careers and interests of so many school leaders over so many years.

However, I do know that HQ has also been working hard over the last six months on making that expertise and passion more accessible, more responsive, and on making sure we have the same influence on the national stage that we do on the front line: So,

- o We have set up a new team dedicated to supporting branches and regions – essential to building a bottom-up democracy and real solidarity at a time of increased fragmentation.
 - o We have a new policy team to track and influence the almost daily initiatives, papers and laws, who are already scoring real successes behind the scenes.
 - o Our specialist advisers are recruiting new team members so we can increase our management advice and are capturing more of that knowledge in model policies and advice documents online.
 - o Our new press officer is getting our name up in lights and our views heard more frequently than ever.
 - o We have more training events than ever, with real clarity on finances and plans for even faster communications with members.
- There are inevitably difficulties in making all these changes, and some turbulence, but I am confident that we have a team of people working for NAHT who are dedicated to serving members and to improving that service. I know it is not the done thing to single out individuals in a team, but Russell Hobby has achieved much in his first nine months. I am convinced NAHT is on the brink of achieving its full potential with such quality leadership. Those of us who have worked with him know just how exceptional he is.
 - I believe that thanks to Russell and his team, NAHT is innovating across a number of areas, from partnerships, to communications, as well as online, but it is still committed to its fundamental role as a trade union and professional association, getting school leaders the freedom, respect and autonomy they deserve to pursue their passion for learning. We are at the early days of these changes but they all lead in the direction of making us more accountable to members and increasing our strength as an organisation to ensure our members' voices are heard.

There is another special person I need to thank. It would not have been possible to be here as your President without the unswerving support of my wife. Ruth was instrumental in encouraging me and reminding me to find and make time early in my current headship to, "Put something back because now

you've got some experience, you can contribute to support those colleagues who may have just entered school leadership...' Ruth, thank you.

Soon after I was elected to the Vice Presidency I received a letter from the Permanent Secretary at the DfE congratulating me on my election and suggesting that it was undoubtedly going to be interesting times to want to lead the association.

I understand that living in interesting times is a Chinese curse. Similarly, there is a Sunny Suffolk saying which says that there are 3 great lies in this world. Firstly, the cheque is in the post. The second is that my wife doesn't understand me (although she always says she does!) The last one is that this Coalition Government does seem to think that just by repeatedly announcing that there isn't any more – 'cos its all gone... that ...they can nonetheless continue to expect us to deliver more and more but with less and less.

To say that the pace of change since Conference last year has been fast and ferocious would be an understatement. After yesterday's wedding, it seems topical to say that each and every day brings something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. Well, you could say that... but, Michael, academies are nothing new and we know that free schools are an idea which was borrowed but, I suppose fast-tracking soldiers as teachers is something entirely new - bringing the army into schools can only be described as truly blue sky thinking! Although it makes you think... if you remember it was Ed who brought Jamie Oliver into schools – so, I wonder, with a military feel whether Michael Gove has plans to bring in the NAAFI to cook our dinners or will it be a new voluntary group called the NAPPI running our Children's Centres? And, with troops in the classroom it gives a whole new perspective to 'Hands Up, who's ready for action?'

What we are trying to cope with is both the pace and enormity of the number of changes. Colleagues, I don't need to remind you that change is much easier in times of plenty – but in times of fiscal austerity we need to spend with care on those things which we value most. But, all the headteachers I know seem to be by nature cautious, prudent and always careful to spend public money wisely and continually with value for money in mind. And, isn't it because of such an approach in past years that schools were criticised for trying to maintain a reasonable carry-forward at year end as contingency planning for unexpected emergencies? What we do know is that money has been wasted in the past... for example, the BSF/PFI consultancy process gorging itself on public funds...on our money... we know it's not just the bankers who've been at the trough and...colleagues, we all know it was not our membership who were the architects of this country's financial mess.

But, I cannot accept that to even consider the taking of EMA away from 16 year olds at this time has been thought-through policy at its best – because this wasn't depriving the middle class of their family allowance - it was taking away the very wherewithal for those in inner cities and in rural areas who needed more than ever to be encouraged to remain engaged with the world of education. NEETS matter in the long term because in challenging

communities such entrenched disillusionment for 16-24 year olds stirs memories of Clockwork Orange for those of you old enough to remember and, of course, these are - as always - the very people least able to speak for themselves. And, I don't think that the proposed bursaries model will provide the answers that such communities need either!

I know that, if we think we've had it hard with the funding settlement to schools this year, what I don't need to remind you of is the painful impact of cutbacks in services provided by local authorities.. We are already beginning to discover that it is schools which will be expected to pick up the pieces as more and more services are passed down to schools and the voluntary sector to deliver. I am not sure that the Coalition fully grasps the point that our deeper knowledge and experience of the communities we serve confirms that many communities do not have such capacity immediately available and on tap in such a time of national need. But, we all know only too well that the most vulnerable staff in our schools at the moment are the army of TAs/LSAs who we've recruited and trained in order that 21st century teaching and learning can happen within an inclusive agenda. The majority of such support staff are drawn from the immediate community served by the school and are, therefore, the best ambassadors any school could have and they are always the most vulnerable staff whenever redundancy arises..

But, I do believe that whatever happens in the forthcoming CSR design brief it is imperative that schools remain stable beacons of hope, opportunity and access within each of the 23,000 communities served by schools - we in schools are at the forefront of the Big Society or is it that '**Big Society is us, ok**'? Education and leading schools have to stay at the forefront of what we do because isn't our expertise, drive and enthusiasm rightly centred in the world of teaching and learning? If this coalition government destabilises schools at this moment in time it must recognise that there will be serious consequences to societal stability.

I can tell you that one sure-fire way of destabilising the complete school system is to create a mass exodus of senior staff from the teaching profession due to pension changes. This will leave the younger members of our profession feeling disillusioned by having to pay more, for longer in order to receive less – particularly when the last pension evaluation confirmed that the TPS was soundly financed.

Another guaranteed way to further destabilise schools at a time when security and stability are most needed is to have more of the same in terms of school inspection.

If anything needed a wake up call it is Ofsted. I can accept that over its lifespan it has brought challenge and some change where needed because not everything in schools was fit for purpose in terms of serving the needs of individuals or of society itself. However, its shape, role and remit have become so monolithic and its processes have become so increasingly broad and invasive that they now permeate the whole of the world of education in a manner never envisaged in the design brief. As an information gathering

source for a limited audience it may serve its original purpose. But, this has spiralled out of control because the extension of its reporting remit now promotes the use of such information for far too many purposes. It only confuses the picture for anyone who lacks the expertise to see the whole image. I ask you, when was it that anyone last needed a little information about lots of schools a la Daily Mail model. What parents and a community really need is lots of information about the performance and standards in a few schools to inform their local choice. What started as an information source to provide ministers with reports on how well money has been spent in the nation's schools fails to ask the key questions of 'Where was the school, where is it now, what are its plans for becoming even better... and how will it get there?'

Instead we have a model where childminders, teachers, nurseries, schools, carers, LA's and colleges all now juggle and spend endless time and energy working to a flawed inspection model's expectations - without Ofsted asking themselves 'Will what we do help and support all schools and (per se) all children?' You can only raise the bar so high before it becomes a barrier which excludes all. Schools know that Ofsted doesn't work. It doesn't bring about school improvement. Why not? Because after successive cycles of inspection we now have an ever-widening gap between the highest and lowest performing schools in this country; with a process which now only serves to sap the enthusiasm and energy out of all in the school system... and, because it has changed the very behaviour of the teaching workforce towards a focus on narrow target-driven responses which only limit the creativity and innovation in curriculum delivery we all so much want to deliver. The challenge for our next HMCI has to be to restore the confidence of the profession, within a 'done with' and not 'done to' culture, which is not afraid wherever and whenever Ofsted challenges poor practice where it does exist. Ofsted should essentially confirm, celebrate and communicate what works well... and where... and why.

Instead, the plans for a new-style Ofsted Framework fails to pick up on these issues. Have you read some of the suggested improvements? Surely, they're having a laugh!

Schools can now request an extra Ofsted - but they'll have to pay for it.

The conversation in my staffroom went, "Mr Harrison, I know times are austere but can we have some more reading books for Year 3?"

"Sorry Miss Prendergast, we're saving up for an Ofsted!"

I ask you, what planet are they living on?

But let's leave the bad news behind us. I want to talk to you about something that I do think is rather more important. Colleagues, for me...I know that I'll only get this one chance to speak to you all as your President and so my choice is to use this opportunity to say to you all that being a school leader, being a HT...is actually the best job in the world. Why?

Because leading a school **is about pride, passion and performance**. It is about believing in what you are doing, communicating the vision and taking

others with you. It is what all of you here do in your schools every single day and we do it so well... and, we should be celebrating our work.

However, each annual survey into HT recruitment seems to confirm that fewer and fewer people are keen to come forward and take their first steps towards headship. It has now become commonplace for half of all vacancies to need to be re-advertised due to low numbers of applicants. And, this is not something that is just confined to particular areas of the UK... it is now widespread and a growing challenge for the governors in many schools to match up what it is that they are looking for in the appointment of a new HT against applications. The selection process is crucial – there have to be sufficient applications to enable selection to take place and there has to be consistency about what qualifications are core requirements for headship. This process of selection and competition is important because once in post the successful appointee gains confidence from knowing that a two-way exchange took place between the candidate(s) and the governors to achieve what it is that all agreed is needed to move the school forward.

Yet research overwhelmingly confirms that, when asked, HTs will confirm that leading a school is the best job in the world! We must be keeping it too much to ourselves – or, are we sending out the wrong messages, I wonder?

And, let me be clear. For me, it is not a job I am in for the money...

Colleagues, like you, I guess that I love the job because I like to work with people – the children, the staff and the families in my school's community. Being able to develop and grow a school climate and culture where children's enthusiasm for learning, for life and keenness to be there each and every day confirms to me **and to my staff** that we share a vision in which high standards are ensured for all... working in an environment where every day is different and where each day brings an experience and insight into the lives of those we work with which cannot fail but to keep you amused.... Let me give you an example. Recently, I bumped into a 3 yr old on first day in our Nursery who approached me, looked up, wiped his hands on his sweatshirt, and offered me his hand and confidently said: 'Hi, I'm Jake... and you are...?' I don't need the FSP or a Phonics Test to tell me that Jake will go far in this world!

Yet, leading a school has changed over the years. I have to confess that my first headship experience was now five decades ago and it seems throughout that time that the pressure to change and change again has been a key feature of the job - although at the core of school leadership the things that really matter remain leading learning and building strong and effective relationships with children, staff and the community served by the school. Everything else should come second to that – I'll say again – leading learning, and the importance of quality relationships with children, staff and the community. Do we not all know that the single most important factor in educational success for all remains the quality of the relationship between the

teacher and the child – as a HT I see it is my responsibility to do all I can to foster, to nurture and to cherish that relationship.

I learnt this early on 'cos my Mum was a HT ... but, in a very different era. Mum used to take her dog to school each day.... a Dalmatian. Would H&S allow her to do so nowadays? Don't think so... because it would need to be registered, licensed etc but, she did it because she believed that animals in schools were important in teaching children how to care, to feel and to react to other living things. The dog used to sit in front of her desk and when children or teachers came by it wagged its tail which used to beat against her desk. When an advisor or inspector approached, it growled and barked! I have to tell you – now that I've started – a boy named Russell (NOT Hobby) was sent to her because he had said 2 inappropriate words to a MDS ... and, the second word was a short one ending in a double consonant blend. In fact the first word began with the same consonant, so phonics aren't new at all, are they? Back to the story. She told him to sit on the floor and get on with a drawing whilst she answered the phone. Some time later she saw a hand appear whilst she was speaking and it reached out for a felt tip pen. She thought no more about it but after some time realised that she heard the child mumbling something. She asked him what was the matter? He replied that he couldn't see the picture. She said: what picture? He said, I've done this and cannot see the shape at all. Mum went round the desk and saw that Russell had joined up the spots!

The moral of the tale is that we all want to see the big picture... we just hope, today, that there is one there for us all to see. And, colleagues, aren't we all having real difficulty in joining up this coalition's dots? I know and expect that our new Gen Sec will manage to make sense of some of the dots and join up our thinking tomorrow morning?

So, it was my Mum who told me it's the best job in the world.... because... in how many other jobs do you have such a chance, such opportunities and such authority to really be able to make a difference to the lives of so many, and to change so many lives for the better? I think that it was Churchill who once remarked on the opportunity and potential we have in school leadership to realise change in society when he said: "Headmasters have powers at their *disposal* with which Prime Ministers and Presidents have never yet been *invested*."

So, why don't people want the job? Essentially, it is not about the paperwork, the bureaucracy, the behaviour of small boys or even the plethora of health and safety and safeguarding regulations. What HT colleagues do tell us is that they don't want to be drawn away from their key purpose by tables, tests and targets -and they don't want to be held accountable for those things over which they not only have little control, but **are** the very areas where they work tirelessly to change, in order to provide better opportunities, better facilities and better life chances – to make a difference! What HTs fear and become most frustrated by are shifting goalposts, endless and poorly thought-out new initiatives and interventions, constant scrutiny and unfair comparison and

punitive measures being applied inconsistently and within a crude accountability system.

Perhaps we are to some extent part of the problem. When did you last hear a colleague shout out loud that theirs is indeed a wonderful job? What messages do we need to send out to those in the staffroom who may be considering career change into considering school leadership – because it has to be a message of encouragement, enthusiasm and a dogged determination to rise to take on the challenges of the job?

So, where do we need school leadership to be if we want to send out the right messages or signals to prospective HTs? I was in the North West Region recently, and on a Sunday morning (Yes, a working weekend!) the delegates had an interesting exercise to complete to identify the kind of leadership style most likely to apply to themselves. By the way...I was the Polar Bear whose natural inclination was to always avoid anything bad by somehow always preferring to move towards something good... However, the key message I took from the conference was that whatever the level of confidence, enthusiasm and energy you had for the job it would seldom be matched by your staff... hence the need for energetic, positive and an enthused school leadership in all schools. Of course, this seems to resonate with the latest Mc Kinsey findings which, once again, confirmed that the quality of teaching in a school cannot exceed the quality of the schools' leadership.

If this is where I see leadership for the future....what is it that we need a government to ensure in terms of active investment in our nation's future? I believe that it is no accident that education at the front line has been less cut than other areas of the public sector. But, to continually hear that £120m a day is spent paying off the deficit reminds me that there hasn't been a period in the past century when all governments have needed to borrow money – so, the question has to be "How much is it reasonable for a government to borrow?" I believe that it is vital that schools remain beacons of hope and opportunity in every community in the coming years; I believe it is our responsibility to fulfil this role throughout the forthcoming era of austerity and cutbacks because who else will champion the rights and entitlement of our young? Who else will champion the right for a fairer future where success at school becomes the norm for all and not just some in society. In that role we must be supported, encouraged and provided with the necessary resources to contribute our part in a national investment for the future. As such, I see headteachers as not only being at the centre, at the very heart, in serving their community but will also lead as agents of reinvigoration towards a better future on behalf of the children in our care.

We should be confident in the work we do... it is work which Geoff Southworth calls 'greedy work...' He reminds us that we are up there with the generals as the two most trusted professional in society... it is no accident that the bottom two on the list are politicians... and journalists! However, I do agree with Geoff when he adds that the days of the Lone Ranger approach towards headship are over. I just don't see it as a job to be done in isolation any longer. I do see

a future where greater partnership and networking between schools becomes the norm -

a future where shared ownership of a community's agenda for change is recognised and worked on through the use and harnessing of capacity within and between schools. This year a partnership of all the primary schools (12) in the town in which I work agreed common PM objectives related to raising standards in writing. This was not because we all had low standards of performance – some had high levels and were better able to share their expertise and experience to the benefit of all. The aim was to build capacity and quality relationships within and between all in the partnership which then makes for a transferable model for change in future areas of school improvement. We have increasingly realised that working in isolation is no longer an option – leading schools in the future requires leaders to work within such partnerships. Together schools can both provide and sustain broader school improvement in the growing absence of traditional external support from local authorities. Indeed, the Association's Charter recommends such a model as being the focus for future inspection – to identify, to share and to promote best practice between schools and where Ofsted becomes more effectively engaged within the school improvement process.

We do learn best when we learn from each other. We know that. Some years ago I had the opportunity to represent NAHT International Committee in Europe through our association with ESHA. It soon became very clear that right across Europe – indeed worldwide - there was an eagerness to meet, to learn and to exchange best practice in school leadership and to avoid unnecessary duplication of research and enquiry. The current President, Ton Duif, and Executive Board of ESHA have become close friends, with whom I share the dream to develop the widest of global connectivity between school leadership. Such a World Forum could meet to set worldwide standards for education; standards which are discussed and decided by educators themselves. We cannot accept that millions youngsters in this world have no access to education at all, with no future other than poverty, continued inequality and indoctrination. I am very happy to inform you that this week the legal body for a World Education Forum has been established and the first Forum will be held in Spring 2014 in The Hague.

I had the pleasure of attending a workshop session at the recent Education Conference in Reading. Like you, whenever I go to any conference or school visit I say to myself the same as I say to staff when they are off site ... 'Try to find something positive to bring back to your own classroom or to improve your thinking and day to day practice.' I joined in with one of Brian Mc Nutt's sessions and found a nugget I'd like to finish with:

'I have come to a frightening conclusion
YOU are the decisive element in the school
It is YOUR personal approach that creates the climate
It is your daily mood which makes the weather
As a HT you possess tremendous power to make parents, staff and children's
lives miserable or joyous
You can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration

You can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal
In all situations it is you and your response that decides whether a crisis will
be escalated or de-escalated and a person or child humanised or de-
humanised.

after Ginott 1972 and Brian Mc Nutt 2011

Thank you.