



Owning what is ours: a manifesto for education

July 2014



Owning what is ours

Every parent wants the chance to send their child to a good school. Every teacher wants to work in a good school and every head wants to lead a good school. *We all agree*. So why is it so hard?

Education reform in the UK usually falls short. It fails to reach every student and every teacher in every school; it achieves compliance more than enthusiasm; its implementation is flawed. Eventually, the noise overwhelms the signal and the pendulum swings back to another vision. This is counter-productive – sticking with it, seeing it through, doing a few things well: these are the only secrets to success.

The reasons for disappointment are straightforward.

Firstly, education is big, with around a million people working in more than 20,000 schools. There will be variation unless we get better at helping schools learn from each other.

Secondly, it is hard to grasp what matters from the centre. The quality of teaching is what really counts, but you can't do much about that from Whitehall; short of the secretary of state standing up in front of a whiteboard – something which everyone, almost certainly including the secretary of state, would rather avoid. We therefore get distracted by structure as something we can grasp, but which is really only a means to an end.

Thirdly, and fuelling the other two, reform has not involved and excited the profession. Indeed, it has usually done the opposite. When the classroom door is shut, the teacher decides what is taught and how. We neglect the enthusiasm of teachers and heads at our peril.

But does winning over the profession mean sacrificing ambition? Who is to blame here: the 'control freaks' at the centre or the 'enemies of promise' in the classroom? There are, of course, two sides to this story. In fact, it is a story of one of the more dysfunctional relationships in modern government.

Too often politicians attempt to *force* the profession to improve. Not only have these diktats done little good, they have also caused a significant harm: they have extracted ambition and self-criticism from the teaching profession and centralised it in Whitehall, the place where it can do the least good. Teaching has become a profession forced on to the defensive.

When targets are missed, or when sacrifices are made to meet them, politicians prefer to castigate rather than engage, destroying the confidence required to solve the real problems we face. As the journalist, writer and Conservative peer Matt Ridley has said: "Innovation is not borne out of despair".

Indeed, the use of crude targets loaded with make or break incentives corrodes the integrity as well as the confidence of education. With our relentless focus on the 'bottom line' we risk sending schools in the same direction as the banks – an education crash to rival the financial crash.

This would do immense damage: teaching is one of the most trusted professions in the country. We cannot stand by and lose that. We have to try to change this relationship. And if we are to do that we have to ask some hard questions as well.

Have we been ignored? Have our concerns been dismissed because we have sometimes been willing to be the victim? Would policies be better if we had played a more active part in their creation? Have there been times when we have been too passive and too ready to be affronted?

There is a better way. It is time for the profession to lead – working with parents and politicians to put an end to the drama and to create change with reach and endurance. We are ambitious for our schools; we should not allow others to supplant our ambitions with their sound-bites. When aspects of our education system are not working, we should be the first to admit it and the first to address them.

This won't be comfortable. We can enjoy being martyrs, believing it absolves us of responsibility while we wait to be rescued. But no one is coming. We must step up. Mutual challenge is as much a part of our professionalism as protection. In fact, quality is the best form of protection. If we uphold the highest standards, there is no excuse for others to intervene.

Our schools contain some of the most dedicated professionals and talented leaders in the country. Teachers are listened to whenever they speak honestly about the system. We will be stronger, and reform will be more effective and enduring, if we make it ourselves.

Consequently, this is not just a set of demands or a wishlist of policies to make our lives easier. This begins as a project for the profession. It is partly a plan for how we will make things better, how we intend to deliver real lasting change that reaches every child in every school.

We could certainly use help, so we invite members of all parties to support us. And we provide suggestions for how. We recognise the bind that politicians are in and the duties they hold to children: they cannot leave us alone until we demonstrate the capacity to lead; but we cannot grow while we are trapped. The prize – a profession properly engaged with reform – is surely worth the effort of building a new partnership. Here is how we could begin.

Our proposals

The following ideas are designed to create a culture for real lasting change through four priorities: by returning the focus and the pride to teaching; by refining accountability; by rebuilding relationships between the profession, government and the public; and by strengthening the bonds between schools.

They are *not* a comprehensive set of education policies; there is nothing about the curriculum, behaviour or safeguarding, for example. In light of major changes to curriculum and assessment being implemented currently, we feel further radical change in these areas in particular would be untimely. The purpose of these proposals is to create an environment in which policy on these topics and others can proceed more rationally.

Restoring the pride in teaching

Professionalism and evidence

Teaching quality is the fundamental driver of standards. If we want real lasting change we have to get to what matters rather than what is easy to measure.

The absence of effective, peer-reviewed professional development is pressing. Teacher quality can be raised and confidence enhanced through a renewed emphasis on professionalism; not the professionalism of isolation and instinct but the professionalism of engagement and evidence.

We support moves to **establish a 'college of teaching'** and envisage this playing a role in disseminating the evidence for best practice. We support Ben Goldacre's proposals for the creation of a **research infrastructure** for education. We see the Education Endowment Fund playing a major role in identifying and validating best practice.

We call for the return of a **mandatory qualification to practice teaching** after training. However, this qualification should be defined in terms of a standard, not the method of training chosen to get there. This could be awarded by schools to teachers in their second year of practising the profession.

Teachers deserve an **entitlement to professional development** at all stages of their career. Whole school inset days are not consistently working for professional development, so should some of this time be allotted differently?

We should reinvent the **formal qualification for headship**, owned by the profession and reflecting the reality of the job while promoting courage, reflection and engagement with the evidence.

We should do more ourselves to **mentor the next generation of school leaders**. With that in mind, NAHT is launching NAHT Edge, an affiliated section for middle leaders, with the intention of helping them achieve senior leadership.

Respect

A profession that raises its game needs to be treated with more respect. Teachers work hard and are seldom properly recognised for it. The current system of directed time and long undirected hours is harmful. What is the point of having 13 weeks' holiday if teachers spend the other 39 weeks working all evenings and most weekends? It is stressful, counterproductive and unhealthy.

We will undertake a study into the evidence base for the impact on students and teachers of holiday patterns; for example **more frequent, shorter holidays** (adding up to the same overall number), or a staggered approach across the country on a broad regional basis. Schools could also consider **more flexible work patterns**.

There should be a **cap on the total number of hours worked** per week during term time. We will investigate the causes of long hours and work with our schools to reduce or eliminate procedures designed for compliance rather than for educational value, working with those who hold schools accountable to reduce the unintended consequences of their demands.

We should decide how important teachers are to our society and put our money where our mouth is. If teachers are a critical profession they should be paid accordingly. This means a **starting salary of £29,000**, comparable to other top graduate professions.

All teachers should be eligible for a **paid, half term-length sabbatical** for every 10 years of service.

We support the principle of **performance related pay progression** based on a rounded judgement of performance.

Early years

Nowhere is the need for professionalism and respect more evident than in the early years of education. The hierarchy of status, spending and attention is upside down. If we put more resources in at the beginning, we would find the work at the end easier. This means ending the artificial divisions between early years and primary education. Professional respect begins with those who work with the youngest children.

Full QTS should be available for early years professionals. Every early years setting should have at least one QTS practitioner. They should be on the same pay structure as others with QTS.

We must **end the age weighted pupil unit**, which pays more the older the student. Secondaries do have additional costs (for exams and facilities) but they should be funded directly.

All children in early years should also be entitled to the pupil premium and the same arrangements for school meals as infant age children.

Accountability that drives the right decisions

Ambition

Aspiration is essential, but the best targets are both stretching and attainable. It is better if they are chosen rather than imposed. The profession must demonstrate that it is more ambitious than those who seek to interfere with it.

We propose an end to national floor standards as triggers for intervention; floor standards are either disappointing because they represent a minimum or they are not floor standards at all. Instead, **each school should sign up to a path towards an ambitious goal**, with the rate of improvement on this path based on evidence of sustainable rates of improvement at different levels of performance. Sticking to the path should protect a school from intervention, creating stability and predictability without sacrificing ambition.

Falling from the path should trigger phased intervention. This in effect creates a rising, individual floor standard for every school. The profession gains stability and fairness and the profession should own this ambition.

Intervention for under-performance should have a single trigger and a single source. We propose that failing schools are identified as those that fall from the path of improvement rather than any absolute floor. The consequence would be an HMI-led inspection and intervention would only follow such an inspection. There should be no alternative inspection regimes delivered via the Department for Education.

Schools should **benchmark themselves against their peers** using family of school data to tackle and reduce variation.

Inspection

We no longer learn effectively from Ofsted. But we want to reform Ofsted, not bury it. Inspection has become fuel for rhetoric rather than improvement, yet the alternative to inspection is the raw league table, the most crude of all measures. **All schools should be inspected on the same criteria**, including free schools and academies, but the current regime can be improved.

We propose **a system of accredited peer review** as the first line of inspection, moderated by HMIs and reinforced by HMI-led inspection of failing or high risk schools. There are many emerging examples of peer review, including NAHT's Instead project, which could provide a proof of concept.

We intend it to become **a duty of membership of NAHT** for all experienced school leaders working in stable schools to participate in such peer review at appropriate times.

Ofsted needs an **independent complaints process**; it is unacceptable for providers to investigate their own complaints.

To support collaboration, we suggest that Ofsted pilots **the group inspection of schools** in federations and trusts. We accept that each individual institution will need a separate report, but judgements and accountability on leadership and management could be shared.

Measurement

Data is vital but narrow. Crude targets attached to high stakes are dangerous. This has been proven in many sectors, including health and financial services.

The profession should welcome transparency. All schools should publish rich and detailed data on progress, attainment and attendance. In return, **formal accountability should be connected with qualitative judgements** and narrative reports.

We should return to the task of developing **a balanced scorecard of school performance** that captures academic excellence, discipline and a basket of measures including resilience, sport and health, art and performance, civic responsibility and PSHE. There will be versions from different parties with different priorities, but the profession can also develop its own.

We support efforts to define and describe wider outputs from education such as resilience, confidence and empathy. We are wary of attempts to produce formal lessons on these topics: they are less about what you do as a school than how you do it.

Rebuilding damaged relationships

Planning

How we change the system is almost as important as *what* is being changed. Too often change is chaotic and hasty, which limits our ability to make it stick. The profession and government become distracted by conflict over principles rather than engaged in discussion around implementation.

We propose an **'office of educational responsibility'**. This office will go beyond existing proposals for evidence collection into planning and managing a five-year reform programme.

This programme would be agreed in advance and subject to rolling review. New proposals for change will need to be submitted to the office for analysis against three tests: evidence of impact, value for money and capacity to implement. It needs to be difficult for ministers to depart from the programme. A high profile chief education officer, coming from the profession, could lead the office.

Politicians would set principles, policies and outcomes. The profession would determine methods and, subject to representation via the office, be able to implement defined and tested policy in good faith.

Governance

Governance is heading towards crisis as the role becomes more demanding. The combination of professional leadership and governance into a single inspection judgement was a mistake, but it merely highlights a deeper trend.

All governors should be entitled to paid time off work on the same basis as service in the armed forces reserves or magistrates.

Governors require training and this should be compulsory and funded by the government. We need more clarity on the distinctive roles of governors and managers. We should streamline governance procedures to speed decision-making and reduce bureaucracy.

Strengthening bonds between schools

Collaboration

There is a middle ground between centralised control and fragmentation of the education system. Schools need to make their own choices but are stronger working together. It is also better if schools can focus on teaching and learning rather than administration.

We believe that **every school should be part of a cluster** or collaborative of schools with strong mutual accountability. We intend to develop a model trust constitution to demonstrate that federation does not mean secession from the wider system.

We believe that schools should join together in larger groups to form **school companies for the procurement and provision of services**. These companies would be transparent, professionally managed and directed by schools themselves.

We must **reward collaboration**. A school could add the gains of any school it is formally supporting to its own path of improvement. This would help excellent schools sustain progress as internal gains become harder. Schools would only keep an outstanding rating if they could demonstrate they were helping other schools.

Local government

Many authorities now lack the capacity for school improvement, forcing them to provide challenge without support. We should focus the role of local authorities on creating and maintaining a level playing field: they become regulators and champions. The time has also come to look again at the role of children's services.

We cannot fairly judge the performance of schools without a level playing field. Schools should continue to be their own admissions authorities but they should not adjudicate appeals. **The power to hear appeals should be returned to local authorities or dioceses** and costs should be capped.

A level playing field also requires a fair **national funding formula**. We urge the government to return to this task.

Local authorities should have **the strategic role in the planning of places** – able to commission new schools and places in both the academy and maintained sectors. They should have **a role in co-ordinating teacher supply**, possibly on a regional basis in partnership with teaching school alliances.

Parents of students with special education needs should be able to **demand a place in a special school** should they judge it appropriate for their children. Local authorities should be accountable for ensuring there is adequate special school provision in their area for this demand and appropriate resources for education, health and social care plans.

To guarantee a level playing field, **pupils from low income families could be entitled to first place in admissions** (along with looked after children as currently) for any school in the country. This could include independent schools with charitable status for up to 10 per cent of their intake. Independent schools could claim the pupil premium for these students and all schools should be able to phase in the growth in numbers over time. We should begin with a full assessment of the effects of this proposal.

We believe, however, that **registration for 'free school meals' is reaching the end of its utility as an indicator of poverty** and deprivation. The time has come to develop a better measure.

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