



Lord Agnew Kt DL

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Lord Watson of Invergowrie
House of Lords
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Dear Lord Watson,

11th February 2019

At the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Urgent Question debate on Tuesday 29 January, you asked what the Government would do to support teachers' mental health and wellbeing. I promised to write.

In developing the Recruitment and Retention Strategy officials listened to hundreds of teachers: they said a more supportive school culture would make the difference. Officials worked closely with sector experts and the teaching unions to consider what the role of central government should be in a school-led system. We concluded that while it is for school leaders, trust boards and governing bodies to set the culture in their schools, they do not operate in a vacuum. My department is responsible for helping to create the climate in which they operate.

In the strategy, we acknowledge that external pressures of accountability, change and challenging pupil behaviour can make the job of leading schools difficult and demanding. In challenging schools leaders must have the clarity, certainty and support that will enable them to create a positive environment for their staff.

The strategy responds to this challenge in a number of ways, including commitments to:

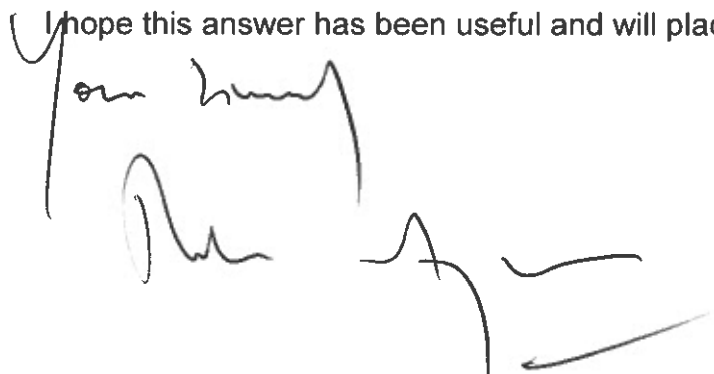
- Radically simplify the accountability system, and working with Ofsted to drive down workload by tackling the 'audit culture', with a new Ofsted framework which actively seeks to reduce unnecessary workload;
- Continue to limit the amount of change that schools have to deliver, with no extra statutory tests or assessment for primary schools; no further changes to the national curriculum; and no more reform of GCSEs or A-levels for the duration of the parliament.
- Provide extra support to tackle challenging pupil behaviour, including more training for new teachers in behaviour and classroom management through the new Early Career Framework, and establishing new behaviour hubs to share best practice on classroom management and effective whole-school systems. There will also be greater emphasis on behaviour in the new Ofsted inspection framework.

There are a number of other commitments in the strategy which may also help. The Early Career Framework includes mentor support so that in those critical early years of teaching the help is there to get teachers off to the best possible start, at the point in their careers where the learning curve is steepest. By having access to this expert help, we hope it will make things easier for these teachers to find better techniques to manage the things they will find most difficult.

Work is also in hand to support headteachers make flexible working a reality for more teachers, which will give them more control about how they work. Creating a culture that promotes flexible working ultimately comes down to headteachers. But DfE are taking steps to support this, by sharing best practice resources to support implementation of flexible working, alongside practical tools such as the "find your jobshare" website and a competition for EdTech providers to create innovative solutions to promote and facilitate part-time and flexible working patterns, including time-tabling tools.

Teachers' wellbeing is a complex issue. The strategy sets out the areas where government can make most difference most quickly. It also marks the beginning of a conversation with headteachers about how we can support them to set a culture in their school that reduces unnecessary planning, marking and data requirements; supports teachers to deal with disruptive behaviour; and establishes a culture that values continued professional development and flexible working at all career stages. This is no easy matter. DfE is exploring what more we can do more to support schools to fulfil their duty of care to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

I hope this answer has been useful and will place a copy in the house libraries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theodore Agnew', written over a large, faint watermark of the same name.

THEODORE AGNEW