

In the know ...

Here is an article by Richard Adams from The Guardian on reaction to Education Secretary Damian Hinds' address to the ASCL conference.



Damian Hinds blames staff turnover for school funding pressure

School leaders express disbelief at education secretary's attempt to put responsibility on teachers

The education secretary faced discontent from headteachers in England over school funding as he sought to win over the profession by promising to reduce their workload and avoid introducing new exams or major reforms.

In his first major speech since taking over the role in January, Damian Hinds acknowledged to the Association of School and College Leaders annual conference on Saturday that funding was tight for schools, but his efforts to blame staff turnover were met with rumbles of disbelief.

"I understand why, for everyone in this room, the funding of our schools and colleges is such an important topic," Hinds said, in response to a question from Geoff Barton, ASCL's general secretary.

"It has been tough, funding is tight, and I don't deny that at all. I know there have been particular funding and cost pressures as well over the last couple of years. But one of those cost pressures, of course, comes from staff turnover, where you're having to replace members of staff who have left. That incurs recruitment costs as well as the general upheaval that comes with that for the school or college."

Hinds' answer was greeted by calls to answer the question, to which Barton, a former headteacher, replied: "We know there is no magic wand to find funding, we know the Department for Education is in a bind." He urged the audience not to make the focus "headteachers shouting things out".

ASCL was among the teaching unions that issued a blunt analysis last week blaming funding pressures for a rise in secondary class sizes, which DfE officials said was fundamentally misleading.

Hinds had earlier earned applause when he said there would be no new tests imposed on primary schools and no overhauls of the national curriculum, GCSE or A-levels for the remainder of the current parliament, beyond those already announced.

Most of his address concerned the workload imposed on state school teachers, which he conceded was partly the result of government policies.

"I do want to acknowledge the government's part in this – because the pace of change has been fast these past eight years, as indeed, to be fair, it was pretty quick in many of the preceding years as well," Hinds said.

"Too many of our teachers and our school leaders are working simply too long hours – and too often on tasks that the evidence shows are not helping children to learn."

Amanda Spielman, the head of Ofsted, said school improvements could be jeopardised if the pressure on teachers was not reduced.

"The record number of good and outstanding schools won't be sustained if the people who make them run so well are burning out and leaving the profession," Spielman told the conference.

She said it was "an utter travesty" that young teachers had their enthusiasm crushed by the pressures of the job, "especially when so many of those pressures are entirely unnecessary".

The chief inspector picked out mock Ofsted inspections, data collection, triple-marking of pupils' work and lengthy lesson plans as "a distraction from the core purpose of education. And a costly distraction at that."

Spielman said: "It really doesn't matter what an inspectorate thinks if we can't attract good people into teaching."

The DfE published research on teacher workload in advance of Hinds' speech, with more than half of teachers interviewed for one study saying their workload pressures were "driven by high expectations set by members of their senior leadership team".

Gerard Walker