

## **NCSL annual lecture**

### **Check against delivery**

It's great to be here today to celebrate your accomplishments as leaders.

Indeed, it makes a pleasant change to talk about leadership rather than deputy leadership. Alan sends his very best, but in a great example of distributed leadership has asked me to act up and cover for him today.

Watching the BBC's "Apprentice" series, it's interesting to see that all the candidates claim to be great leaders.

However, *their* concept of leadership seems to consist of massive over-confidence in their own abilities, contempt for their colleagues and taking pleasure in stabbing each other in the back.

No, I said watching The Apprentice, not the Week in Westminster.

Perhaps we could all learn a few lessons on leading with integrity from the hundreds of heads here today.

Every time I visit a school, I am impressed by the commitment to changing lives. By the time and energy invested in new ideas and approaches in a continuous drive for improvement.

This determination is paying off. Each year, more pupils are leaving primary school able to read and count, attaining five good GCSEs and getting good A-levels.

But even with the incredible progress we have made over the last decade, there are still too many people without the proper skills to succeed.

Last year, Lord Leitch set out the challenge we face in our modern, global economy. Too few young people are staying on in education or training after 16.

And despite the great strides made in recent years, a legacy of adult illiteracy and innumeracy continues to undermine our economy – a real affront to social justice.

Today we face stronger competition than ever before. Businesses and individuals compete within the European Union, with the United States, and all around the globe.

We can't compete on cost - not when wages in China are on average less than five per cent of our own.

We can only compete on quality. By being the most educated, innovative and ambitious. Only then can we achieve a high skill/high wage economy.

But we can't achieve this without strong leaders like you. All the evidence shows that quality of leadership is second only to the quality of teaching in promoting school improvements.

So today I want to publicly congratulate you on your achievements and express my sincere thanks for the outstanding job that you are doing.

I also want to thank Steve, Vanni and NCSL for all their excellent work.

Just one example is their recent advice on the redesign of the National Professional Qualification for Headship – advice which recognises the experience of the twenty thousand leaders who have already gained this qualification. I am happy to publicly endorse your proposals for the next steps.

I am also delighted that Vanni has been reappointed as Chair of NCSL's governing body. He has made an exceptional contribution over the past few years and I am very pleased that we will continue to work together.

As Steve described earlier, school leadership has changed beyond all recognition in recent years.

Schools are working closely with other services to address all the needs of individual children and thinking about their safety, health and wellbeing. You are involving parents more actively, opening up even more to the community and sharing your precious resources.

It's a big ask – but a challenge you are rising to admirably. And we in government need to translate our appreciation and value for your work into more concrete support.

So the social partnership, where we work with the unions and professional associations on workforce issues, is particularly going to be focusing on how we can better support headteachers over the coming months – helping to reduce your individual workload and achieve a better work life balance.

In thinking of what it must feel like to be a head on the receiving end of government guidance, I am reminded of the scene early on in the first Harry Potter. Where the inhabitants of number seven Privet Drive cannot escape the torrent of paper being posted through the letter box.

I am sure some heads must relate to that experience. Except instead of letters and owls, it's government guidance and instructions raining down on you.

Some of that is obviously essential. But I am currently thinking very hard about what more we can do to make sure that you get what you need, when you need it, in the way that you need it– and only that.

However, there are things you can do too. The energy and hours that you invest in your schools are testament to your dedication and commitment.

But you must make sure that energy and those hours are being invested in the right places, at the right times.

Is the 'super-head' really delegating as well as she could be? Does the school community still look to the "hero-head" for everything, rather than turning to his deputies?

Leadership teams aren't only in the interests of schools. They are in heads own best interests, helping them to focus where they make the most difference.

And with the complexity of school organisations today, it's increasingly recognised that those team members, in some circumstances, don't have to be teachers.

The fact that so many school business managers and bursars are here today visibly proves their skills are increasingly needed and valued.

Schools are increasingly complex organisations, not only with financial and human resource management tasks but also with increasingly having to work with everyone from civil servants to civil engineers. There is simply no way that any individual can directly manage that alone.

You could compare it with managing a football club.

Martin O' Neill, Alex Ferguson and the great Arsene Wenger spend their time thinking about the team sheet not the balance sheet. They don't expect the physio to be out mowing the grass.

Instead, they surround themselves with highly skilled individuals who excel in their individual areas and complement their own attributes – whilst letting them get on with what they are good at.

This means that they are each focused on what they do best – getting the best out of a team of professionals.

Deborah Duncan, from Horbury School in Wakefield, is one head that has built a team made up of specialists and experts – but not all in teaching.

Three members of her team are qualified in personnel management, finance and marketing and ICT. So her senior teachers can focus on teaching, while she can concentrate on the school's strategic direction.

Deborah says her colleagues have moved from being just a group of disparate individuals, into a coherent team – sharing ambitions for their school and with a clear sense of how to achieve those.

What I want to stress is that you must build a team which works for you. Leadership for the future means finding a model which fits your own particular circumstances.

So smaller schools who simply don't have the numbers and resources to create a leadership team for their individual school might want to think about building a team across their community.

Federating with other local schools, with an executive head at the top of the structure setting the strategic direction, and outstanding deputies looking after the day to day management.

Other schools may benefit from outside support – perhaps from a National Leader in Education. Heads in this programme are already helping to turn around schools in really difficult circumstances.

It's clear that we need to be more flexible in finding the solution to suit the circumstances we find on the ground. But there must always be a properly qualified head of teaching and learning, and there must always be the people willing to fill the leadership posts.

As you know, demographic changes mean that over the next few years, we will have fewer people at the very moment that we need more – unless we act now.

As I've stressed – and as Steve emphasised earlier - the evolving nature of the role means that we need to be preparing people now for the future demands of headship – attracting highly skilled people who are confident in managing change.

That's why NCSL's work is so important. I think Steve is quite right when he says we don't need a strategy, we need individual solutions.

I saw that for myself when I spent some time before Christmas observing the great work Paul Grant does at the Robert Clack School in Dagenham.

Events in Westminster over the past few months show why a stable and orderly transition is so important.

Like MPs, pupils, parents and teachers need stability, confidence in their leader, and reassurance that there is effective planning for the future.

So I am speaking to you this morning not just as the leaders of today, but as those who will inspire and shape the leaders of tomorrow.

Fortunately, the pool of talent that you have available to draw from, for your potential “apprentices”, is much wider than that which Sir Alan Sugar has to choose from.

Not only do we have more teachers today, but their enthusiasm, integrity and dedication to their profession has never been more evident.

Nevertheless, those in deputy or middle management positions seem more reluctant to move into senior leadership roles.

There are a variety of reasons for this – ranging from concerns about workload to a worry that they become too far removed from the teaching that they enjoy so much.

I believe that, together, we can address these concerns and sell headship as the fantastic opportunity that it is.

Making headship a more attractive proposition. Reducing the burdens on headteachers. Building leadership teams that allow teachers to focus on the teaching they love. All the things that I have been talking about this morning.

But building the right structures will only take us so far. Potential leaders have to be nurtured and supported as individuals. Given the opportunities they need to gain confidence and skills. That is where you – as role models and coaches – can help bring on the next generation.

I was delighted to meet the first group of Future Leaders last month. They have the chance to learn from leaders in urban schools by working closely with them.

That kind of attention to individual personal development is what will make the difference and attract the calibre of leaders that we need. It's up to you to identify your own "Apprentices" and help them to develop and progress.

Finally, I just want to spend a few moments talking about some of the most important aspects of school leadership.

Leaders create a culture of aspiration and progress. They don't accept excuses for underachievement and make the most of everyone's talents – informed by the conviction that every child has it in them to succeed.

The government's commitment to enabling each individual child to realise their potential is absolute.

I know that is a commitment shared by everyone in this room. And an emphasis on personalised learning – with education tailored to individual needs and talents - is the way that we can make excellence the standard for all.

Building on the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review, we are focusing on the ways that personalised learning can help every child to progress.

Whether that's a child who is convinced that books are boring, or another whose boredom escalates into bad behaviour, or yet another who is struggling but overlooked because they are quiet and unassuming.

There are many schools across the country who won't accept any of these characteristics as excuses for slow progress or poor performance.

To share their experience and their strategies, we have published the latest in a series of publications on progression – called “Making Great Progress”. This analyses the features of schools in which all pupils progress in order that other schools can benefit.

We have also announced the schools which are going to be working with us in the progression pilots – helping to look at different ways of measuring, assessing, reporting and encouraging progress.

This doesn't mean an end to testing. Tests are a critical measure of accountability.

Parents rightly want to know how well their child is doing as well as the overall school performance.

But we need to make sure the measures that we are using are the right ones. And that schools which help children to progress and reach their full potential are recognised and rewarded.

Just as importantly, testing should be a springboard not a snapshot. Used by both teacher and student to understand where they are now, and what they need to do next.

The schools interviewed for “Making Great Progress” report agreed effective use of data to support rigorous tracking is essential to encouraging individual progress.

But testing isn't the only weapon in the armoury.

“Making Great Progress” outlines a whole range of different features which make a difference. And, as you'd expect, leadership is identified as absolutely critical.

Effective heads have their ear to the ground of the classroom, spending significant time with both pupils and teachers. Their personal values shine through in the zeal and enthusiasm which they bring to their role. They make the most of the talents and skills of their staff. And they get the job done.

We think that every school has the potential to follow the example set by the schools in “Making Great Progress”.

Indeed, some schools here today are going to be part of the progression pilots – from Notley Green Primary School from Essex and Pebsham Community Primary from East Sussex to the Heart of England School in Solihull. They will all help us to create a reality where every school and every pupil is making great progress.

Headteachers make a difference – to so many children, in so many ways. Our task in government is to give you the freedom and resources to make that

difference. I'm looking forward to hearing how you think we can help you – and the changes that you yourselves are making. Thank you very much.