

# Damian Hinds to cut workload to tackle teacher shortage

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The education secretary has promised to cut teachers' workload in an attempt to resolve a recruitment crisis in England's schools.

Damian Hinds told a head teachers' conference in Birmingham that there will be no more new changes to primary tests, GCSEs or A-levels.

But he faced challenges from delegates over school funding shortages.

And Mr Hinds told head teachers: "It has been tough, funding is tight, I don't deny that at all."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, welcomed the education secretary's promise to cut the "bureaucratic burden" on teachers.

In his first speech to heads and teachers since becoming education secretary, Mr Hinds said that tackling the teacher shortage was a "top priority".

Mr Hinds said long hours and red tape were among the "biggest threats" to recruiting and retaining staff.

For five successive years, recruitment targets for

teaching have been missed and schools have complained of the expense and disruption of relying on temporary staff or having to use teachers who are not specialists in the subjects they are teaching.

Schools are spending £835m per year on supply agencies, according to the most recent government figures.

The education secretary told the head teachers' conference on Saturday: "With rising pupil numbers, I recognise that recruitment and retention is difficult for schools.

"And, clearly, one of the biggest threats to retention, and also to recruitment, is workload.

"Too many of our teachers and our school leaders are working too long hours - and on non-teaching tasks that are not helping children to learn."

Mr Hinds promised head teachers no more changes to the curriculum or to testing and exams in primary or secondary school until the end of this Parliament.

But existing reforms that are already in the pipeline, such as the roll-out of changes to GCSEs, will go ahead.

# Faith schools: Complaints over admissions rising

Complaints about faith schools' admissions policies are on the rise as the Conservatives push ahead with proposals that could unleash a new wave of more religiously selective schools across the country.

Many existing faith schools have complex policies for allocating school places when oversubscribed, which critics say advantage more affluent parents over families from working-class backgrounds.

Councils are also concerned children in care are 'disadvantaged' by faith schools that give priority to children who belong to the religion of the school over vulnerable children who do not.

From February 2017 to January 2018, there were 23 objections about faith-based admissions, up from 21 objections the year before. Over the two-year period, 33 of the 44 faith objections were upheld or partially upheld.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds is said to be pushing ahead with plans to abolish a cap on new religious schools that stops them from selecting more than half of their pupils from their religion.



A report from the social mobility charity, Sutton Trust, in March last year suggested faith schools were among the most 'social selective' of top state schools in the country.

In a recent interview, Conor Ryan, director of research and communications at the Sutton Trust, said that he did not think the 50 per cent cap in new faith schools should be lifted.

"We think it is important that new faith schools are open to a wider group in the community. The danger [with removing the cap] is that you lose the community focus," he warned.

# Cut school autonomy to prevent bullying of headteachers, says Ofsted chief

Referring to the row over one school's hijab ban, Amanda Spielman says sensitive decisions should be taken out of schools' hands and passed to local authority, MAT or central government level.

During questioning by the Commons Education Select Committee, Ms Spielman discussed the case of St Stephen's Primary, in the East London borough of Newham, where the Headteacher reversed a ban on pupils under the age of 8 wearing the hijab, in response to pressure from campaigners.

She said: "We have a very autonomous school system, where we delegate a great deal down to individual heads. Compared with most countries in the world, we give more autonomy to individual heads.

"If we are going to end up with an asymmetry, where

people conscientiously running often very small schools can be effectively bullied and targeted in this way, I think we're in a very worrying world.

"So it opens the question to me whether it is right to leave so much decision-making at individual school level, and whether some of these decisions that are becoming increasingly sensitive should be taken at local authority or MAT [multi-academy trust] or central government level."

She added that the campaign against the hijab ban was largely conducted by people unconnected with the school.

"I don't think that individual schools should be bullied by national lobbying campaigns," she said. "I think that's very different from consulting parents and finding working arrangements that are acceptable."

# National Offer Day: 100,000 pupils set to miss out on their first choice school

100,000 pupils are set to miss out on their first choice of secondary school amid higher competition for places, analysis shows.

More than half a million families in England will learn which school their child will attend in September, on what is known as "national offer day".

The number of pupils who fail to get a place at their preferred school is due to rise by seven per cent this year, according to analysis by the Good Schools Guide.

Their research indicates that one in five children will fail to secure a place at their first choice school, up from around one in six last year.

25,000 children will find out that they not got place at any of the secondary schools which their parents listed in their application, their analysis also shows.

The demand for places has increased sharply over the past five years, as a bulge in primary school population due to a rise in birth rates passes up into secondary schools.

Families in urban areas are most likely to be affected by the shortfall in places, with parts of London, Greater Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham expected to receive more applications than they have school places.

In 2013/14, there were just under half a million pupils applying for secondary school places, which had risen to



over 560,000 by 2017/18.

Bernadette John, director of The Good Schools Guide, said that DfE officials have failed to address the problem of insufficient school places, despite the growing numbers of pupils.

"It is incredibly stressful for parents when their child is offered a place at a school a long journey from home, or with a damning Ofsted report, or which for very good reasons they have not chosen for their child," she said.

## University strike: Pension plan could be reversed

University bosses say they could reverse changes to lecturers' pensions if economic conditions improve.

As strike action continues for a second day at 57 universities, the employers' group, Universities UK, has written to pension scheme members offering to explore alternative ideas.

The University and College Union (UCU) says current plans will leave a typical lecturer £10,000 a year worse off.

About 90,000 students have now signed petitions asking for fee refunds.

Under the existing plans, the Universities Superannuation Scheme will change from a defined benefit scheme, giving members a guaranteed income in retirement, to a defined contribution scheme, where pensions are subject to changes in the stock market.

The employers say changes to the pension are needed because the scheme has a deficit of more than £6bn, but the union disputes the figure, saying the evaluation method

used was "recklessly prudent."

However, in an open letter to scheme members, UUK suggests the change might not need to be permanent.

"We wanted to make it clear that we have never refused to continue to try to find an affordable, mutually acceptable solution," says the letter, signed by Prof Dame Janet Beer, UUK's president, along with its chief executive, Alistair Jarvis.

"We are open to changing the scheme again to reintroduce defined benefits if economic and funding conditions improve," it continues. The letter invites members of the scheme to put forward "any proposals you feel may not have been sufficiently considered".

In response, Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary, said: "If they want to talk to us without preconditions, as the universities minister has suggested, then let's do it today. The sector is suffering from a serious image problem at the moment and staff and students deserve much better from their leaders than spin and subterfuge."