

NASUWT

March 2007

REPORT

ENGLAND

EDUCATION – CONTINUING BUDGET PRIORITY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget announcement on 21 March contained a welcome continuing financial priority for education.

NASUWT believes that the focus on education was a recognition of the enormous efforts teachers, headteachers and other members of the school workforce have made to deliver the increasingly challenging agenda of raising standards.

The announcements on the proposed increase in per-pupil funding, and the extension to free entitlement to nursery provision for three to four year olds, are critical improvements in current provision.

Chris Keates, General Secretary, said: "Whilst the allocation is a 5% increase in cash terms, there is an ever-expanding list of demands which will be made on schools and the workforce.

"The Chancellor's reference to 'maintaining the discipline in public sector pay' resonates sharply given the impending referral by the DfES to the School Teachers' Review Body of consideration of the first three-year pay award for teachers and headteachers.

"Budget settlements provide the opportunity for Governments to refocus their priorities but in doing so they must recognise the central importance of maintaining a world-class school workforce which is highly rewarded and motivated. Putting a 2% cap on public sector pay would jeopardise this agenda."

RAISING THE AGE OF LEAVING EDUCATION

The DfES published this month the Green Paper proposals on raising the age of leaving education. These were designed to address the undeniable evidence that young people who leave education early without qualifications are at much greater risk as adults of low income and social exclusion.

Chris Keates said:

"The rationale and the vision underpinning the proposals are undoubtedly right.

"Raising the leaving age will, however, have significant implications for the workforce in schools and FE.

"Staffing, provision of targeted support and the capacity of existing facilities are obvious issues to be addressed. With

appropriate funding and carefully planned implementation these are unlikely to be insurmountable issues.

"But perhaps the most significant challenge, particularly during the transition phase, will be that of enforcement. It is unlikely that a change in the law will change the minds and attitudes of youngsters who are disinclined to stay on now. This is a duty which should rest firmly with local authorities and not with individual schools."

It is planned for the proposals to take effect from 2015. A consultative exercise has been launched and NASUWT will be responding in detail to this.

Making Good Progress

The DfES has announced the ten local authorities which will participate in the Making Good Progress pilot to look at the use of the end of key stage tests.

These are : Leicestershire • Essex • Westminster • Bexley • Liverpool • East Sussex • Gloucestershire • Solihull • Calderdale • South Tyneside.

NASUWT believes that the principles underpinning the pilot have the potential to restore to teachers their ability to use their professional judgement to determine when it is appropriate to test pupils, rather than being constrained by their age or a fixed date in the calendar.

The Secretary of State has given a firm commitment to giving teachers the freedom and the resources they need to deliver the changes without adding to the pressure they already face. It will be critically important that the pilot ensures that any proposed changes in the tests, and the way they are administered, does not add to the workload of teachers or result in

unnecessary bureaucracy. Therefore, it will be crucially important to maintain external markers for the tests.

Chris Keates, General Secretary, said:

"NASUWT welcomes the Making Good Progress strategy but informed decisions about the future of the end of key stage tests depend on getting the evaluation methodology for the pilot right.

"A crucial factor will be the inclusion of a scientifically identified control group to enable rigorous evaluation of the overall impact of the Making Good Progress strategy and the implications for the future direction of testing and assessment.

"In order to do this a percentage of schools within the pilot areas should have the statutory tests and performance league tables suspended to enable teachers to trial the 'stage not age' testing proposals unencumbered."

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