

EMBARGO

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NASUWT CAMPAIGNS SECURE MORE BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

Commenting on the package of measures to be announced today by the Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, at a Conference for New Headteachers, to give schools more support in tackling a range of problems, **Chris Keates, General Secretary of NASUWT**, the largest union representing teachers and headteachers throughout the UK said:

"The Secretary of State's proposals represent an important and positive step forward on a number of issues on which NASUWT has campaigned.

"It is evident that the representations NASUWT has made have had significant impact on Government policy.

School Visits

"Teachers who have taken the difficult decision to withdraw from participating in school visits will be heartened by the Secretary of State's recognition that their concerns and fears about the risks involved in such activities are valid.

"There is no doubt that the Secretary of State is seeking to honour the commitment he gave to the NASUWT Annual Conference this year on this issue.

"NASUWT has been working with the DfES to develop the package of measures scheduled to be announced in the New Year.

False allegations

"False allegations blight lives and wreck careers.

"The publication of a consultation document on strategies to tackle this persistent menace is a mark of the success of the NASUWT's long-running campaign to secure effective measures to protect teachers.

"Rapid identification and dismissal of false, malicious and exaggerated claims should not only reduce the number of teachers traumatised by lengthy investigations but also help to minimise the risk of public exposure of those falsely accused.

"I warmly welcome the progress which has been made.

"NASUWT will wish to monitor closely the impact of these measures before accepting that legislative change to secure anonymity for those accused is no longer required.

Behaviour in schools

"The proposal to ensure that all schools, regardless of their status, will be required to take equal responsibility for hard to place pupils is long overdue.

"Seeking to avoid admitting pupils with difficulties may be understandable in a performance league table driven system, but it is not acceptable.

"Balancing this provision with a limit on the number of excluded pupils a school can be required to admit is fairer and more equitable but not without difficulties.

"The concept of Foundation Partnerships to support pupils at risk of exclusion is interesting and has the potential to provide the early intervention support many schools desperately need. However, to be effective there must be a clear expectation on all schools to participate in them.

Knives and offensive weapons

"Incidents involving knives and other offensive weapons are extremely rare and schools remain relatively safe havens of peace and security.

"However, the Secretary of State is entirely right to recognise that it is important to keep them that way and to introduce measures to prevent the growing offensive weapon-carrying culture among young people on the streets from spilling over into schools.

"I am very pleased that the proposed measures include the facility for the random, unannounced police searches suggested by NASUWT. This has the potential to be not only a method of detection but an effective deterrent.

"However, I have real concerns about the appropriateness, efficacy, or desirability of the suggestion that schools should be able to conduct searches themselves, if the intention is that teachers could be required to carry them out. NASUWT will study the proposals carefully but could not support any strategy which increased the risk of teachers facing assault or child abuse claims.

"Evidence and experience demonstrates that there is no single measure to tackle pupil indiscipline and improve school security. The package of measures announced today is, overall, a welcome extension to the range of options available to schools."