

A quiet time ahead

Roy Blatchford

September 2024

The Prime Minister's miserable message to the nation about 'things getting worse before they get better' risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

For a moment, contrast his message with these refreshing words from HH the President of the UAE, sent to all schools to mark the start of the school year:

To all students, educators, teachers and workers in the education sector in the UAE, I congratulate you on the start of the new academic year.

First, I want you all as students to be good role models in your schools and homes by respecting and appreciating your teachers and parents.

You are the future of our nation, and education is an essential element of the UAE's developmental journey in the present and future.

Happily, the new Secretary of State for Education has struck a different note from that of the PM. At the end of last term Bridget Phillipson gave an open interview with the intention of resetting the dial at the DfE. By common acclaim she succeeded, coming across as personable, savvy and in listening mode.

Further, announcements this summer have reinforced that the curriculum review will not be hurried and that teachers will be awarded a fair pay increase. 'A quiet time ahead' I hear you say.

Yes, this *is* a point in time when leaders and teachers can really focus upon the cocktail of successful schools: creating an irresistible climate for learning and securing good attendance; providing engaging and purposeful lessons every day of the week; orchestrating excellent pastoral systems to promote wellbeing and meet the needs of 'children on the margins'; enabling extra-curricular activities to flourish; ensuring that professional development and management of workload are of the highest quality.

Thus, the joyful day-to-day business of schools, untrammelled by the politics of the day.

Yet politics in a democracy cannot resist intruding. Experienced school leaders know that. Of particular note is the fact that a record 335 new MPs have been inducted, with a further 15 returning to parliament after a period of absence.

Those 350 need educating about the education landscape. Their email boxes will fill readily with debate around tax, so leaders need to be on the front foot and invite their local MP into school. Those local parliamentarians need to appreciate the embedded challenges of SEND, recruitment, the state of buildings - *soonest*.

And as the academic year unfolds, what are the issues likely to pass across the Secretary of State's desk and engage stakeholder and media attention? I hazard seven:

1. The Code of Practice: the clamour to revise the Code will increase relentlessly, calling for a judicious balance between the capacity of schools to meet special educational needs and the demands of parents. Much across the school system rests on this.
2. The Disadvantage Gap: this is not going away anytime soon; the plight of 'the forgotten third' will continue to resonate, companioned by the legacy of the summer disorders.
3. Workload: historically with Labour governments, professional associations and unions have pushed hard on workers' rights; how will proposed legislation for a four-day week impact on schools?
4. Ofsted: what is the future for the national inspectorate and school report cards; what will Ofsted's position be on attainment and progress data?
5. Early Years: much rhetoric pre-election was linked to what is now The Children's Wellbeing Bill; what investment will actually be felt in *local* communities?
6. Speech, language and reading: the important Oracy Commission reports this autumn; what meaningful follow-up shall we see, led by the DfE?
7. The trust-led landscape: will MATs as school improvers increasingly play second fiddle to the proposed regional improvement teams?

As ever, events and unintended consequences will dictate the direction of political travel.

Meanwhile, teachers are returning to classrooms with the usual optimism and high expectations every new school year brings.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is ['The A - Z of Great Classrooms'](#), published by John Catt.