



*Email to Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk*

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

6<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Dear Gillian,

We have been overwhelmed with complaints about the remarks you made on the Jeremy Vine show yesterday.

School leaders have once again been thrown into unnecessary crisis management by the failures of government. To now be insulted by the Secretary of State with an insinuation that they are lazy and need to be told to get off their backsides is unacceptable.

Your phrase "...there's 5% of schools or responsible bodies that have not responded to the survey, now hopefully all this publicity will make them get off their backsides..." lacks precision, and professionalism. It also paints a false picture whilst hiding the continuing failings of your department.

The statutory position is clear - it is responsible bodies that are required to reply to the survey. The imprecision of your phrase has led to the wide interpretation by the media and the members we represent that you meant individual headteachers. As a high-ranking professional politician, it is reasonable for people to assume you will know how your words will be interpreted and especially after your remarks the day before that you would have been more careful than normal.

Your remarks also failed to reveal the fact that many responsible bodies have attempted to return the survey but that the systems at the DfE have meant that it has been impossible, or that some bodies have been erroneously identified as not having made a return when in fact they have - a situation you acknowledged in the margins of yesterday's meeting.

The hard-working professionals we represent are frankly tired of being unfairly criticised by politicians that find themselves in a bind. Your words of praise for their efforts and hard work therefore ring hollow because of this and the trust and respect that profession should have in the secretary of state is diminished as a consequence.

We are in the middle of a recruitment and retention crisis. Moments like this give life to the view that school leadership is held in low esteem and contribute to the reasons dedicated public servants leave. It also creates barriers to new professionals joining. It is now essential that you immediately and publicly correct the record and apologise to our members. A failure to do so will be further interpreted as contempt for them and their efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Whiteman  
General Secretary | NAHT

Geoff Barton  
General Secretary | ASCL