ANDREW MARR SHOW, DAMIAN HINDS, MP

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Education Secretary

AM: And so to Damian Hines, the new Education Secretary. Lots to talk about. Access to Oxbridge, school budgets under pressure and much more. Let’s start with Oxford in fact. Since you were at Oxford and you’re the Education Secretary, what is your reaction to the revelation about how few black kids are getting into Oxford at the moment?

DH: Well, morning Andrew. It’s great to see you back. Of course I read that report from Oxford with great interest and it’s really important that we have the widest possible access to top universities, including Oxford. Now to be fair I think if you look at the –

AM: Do you think they have failed in some way?
DH: - I think if you look at the proportion of young people coming into Oxford in that report and compare it to the proportion of the population that are from black and minority ethnic communities, they’re actually pretty similar. But there were other things as well that have to be looked at. There’s real focus I think on parts of the country and Oxford are rightly noting that they need to get more applications from the north east and so on. So it’s absolutely right and there’s a lot of money being spent on widening access to top universities and it has to reach out to every ethnic group and every part of the country.

AM: Because your Junior Minister in charge of universities Sam Gyimah said there has to be a ‘game changer’ when it comes to this. What is the game changer?

DH: Well the game changer has – I mean to some extent the game has already changed. To a very large extent it has. So we’ve got more young people going to university than ever before, but
also more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university than ever before, but we need to have more in going into the top selective universities.

AM: So how are you going to do that?
DH: Well, we’re going to do it by insisting through the, through the Office for Students that top universities are doing absolutely everything they can and proactively reaching out, as by the way to be fair many already are and being very effective in doing that. Making sure they are reaching out and widening their access as much as possible.

AM: Okay, so take two Oxford colleges at random, one of which is doing a huge amount to reach out and try and get kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, white and black in and the other one is frankly ignoring the issue and taking everybody from Eton, Winchester and all the rest of it. Does the Office then intervene to penalise the quotes, ‘bad college,’ and help the quotes, ‘good one?’

DH: Well I think we have to look at –
AM: But you do.
DH: We have to look at a university level as well and you know Oxford and Cambridge have a college structure –
AM: No, I’m just giving you an example.
DH: But at the university level there’s also responsibility and I think colleges do actually work together. But you know what the Office for Students will do is you know, look at what everybody’s doing, they report on it already, you know, there’s these access agreements to be able to charge the fees that universities do, they have to commit to certain things and we have to keep on working harder on that.

AM: Okay. When Theresa May walked out into the sunshine and gave that very, very first speech when she was Prime Minister she
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talked about ‘the burning injustices,’ and we all remember what she said. She said: “one of the burning injustices is that so few white working class boys in this country make it to university at all.” How worried are you about it and what are you doing about it?

DH: I think what the Prime Minister has done with the Race Disparity Audit is very, very effective in shining a light on these issues and facing up to some uncomfortable truths. And then you know that’s the first stage just to –

AM: Does the Race Disparity Audit pick out white boys?

DH: Yes, it does. It picks out all races by definition and compares them and that’s a really important first stage. You know we need to make sure that attainment is as high as it can be for children in all parts of the country and from all different ethnic groups. We’ve already seen the attainment gap between the rich and the poor narrow by 10% at both primary and secondary, but there’s always more to do and we need to keep working at it.

AM: Because you’ve focused there on schools and up and down the country, particularly in England which is your responsibility, head teachers are screaming with pain about their budgets at the moment. They’re saying we have done everything humanely possible to live within our budgets and to raise money by going to parents and dipping out of one fund and into another and all the rest of it, we are now at breaking point. Do you accept there is a crisis in the education funding of English schools?

DH: Look, I recognise that it - you know budgets are tight and managing those budgets for a school is –

AM: But it can’t go on like this for much longer, can it?

DH: - you know presents – presents challenges. But it is also true that there is more money going into schools in England than there ever has been before. £42.4 billion this year and it will be –

AM: Not in real terms.
DH: - and it’ll be 43 and a half next year. So actually we are protecting – we are protecting the per pupil real terms funding overall across the system at a time when pupil numbers are rising.

AM: I want to be polite and nice, but I ask you whether that is really true. I’ve got some figures here which I’d like everyone to look at which is the increase up and down in per pupil funding. This is the real increase. Now elderly viewers will notice that’s someone called Margaret Thatcher at the end there. Very tough. Funding goes up 2% under Margaret Thatcher. There’s then an economic crisis. This is a real terms cut. Real terms it comes down very modestly under John Major. Then Tony Blair comes in, real terms funding goes up by nearly 5%. It goes up again under Gordon Brown by 1%, despite the crisis. Then there’s the austerity years, it goes down by half a percent under David Cameron. Under Theresa May, under you, it’s gone down by 0.7%. It’s a worse record than anybody else. These are the IFS’s figures about real term funding. That is the truth about what’s going on.

DH: So the IFS, as you rightly say, have done these figures and they say that yes, this money is protected for the next couple of years and then at the end of that cycle, if you look at per pupil funding in 20 –

AM: It’s the worst record in 40 years.

DH: - in 2020, it’ll be 50% higher than it was a generation previous. 50% higher than in 2000. So yes, budgets are tight. There is no denying that. But it is also the case that there is more money going into schools across the piece than there used to be.

AM: Austerity was something that happened after 2008. Now we all understand that. But this has been years on and still real terms funding per pupil is 0.7% down under Theresa May compared to a sharp increase for somebody like Margaret Thatcher. That is a disgraceful record, isn’t it?
DH: No. We’re holding constantly per pupil real terms funding for the next couple of years and as I say this is at a time –
AM: But you’ve seen the figures, you’ve seen the figures, I’m sorry.
DH: - but this is at a time when pupil numbers are also increasing and there is more money going into schools than ever before. We’re also spending more money on early years than any previous government which also helps –
AM: Budgets are at popping point.
DH: - which helps kids to be ready when they come into school. There are more teachers in school than there have ever been before. 450,000 teachers in our schools today. So yes, as I say, you know budgets are tight but there is more, there is more resourcing going in.

AM: Have you been talking to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about rising budgets in schools?

DH: I regularly talk to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Of course we talk about the entire education landscape, we talk about schools, we talk about colleges, we talk about the funding that needs to go with those things to make sure that everything is properly funded. Of course we found a further £1.3 billion to put into the schools budget to make sure we could protect the real terms people funding. We’ve got half a billion pounds will be going in per year on T-levels, once they come in.

AM: I’m going to come onto T-levels in just a second, yeah.
DH: Once they come in fully. We’ve got £23 billion going over five years on school capital, including being able to find – being able to create all those extra places where there’s demand.

AM: It’s not just people on the Left and it’s not just the teaching unions who say there’s not enough money going into schools. John Redwood is by nobody’s standard a wild liberal left winger.
John Redwood says – talking about his own area, his own constituency: “we are now at the point where it is simply too little, we simply do not have enough.” And many Tory MPs think the same.

DH: So look, of course it is vital that we have schools up and down the country properly resourced. Through the National Funding Formula actually what we’re doing over a period of a few years is making sure that schools that were historically underfunded by the way by you know all governments in the past, historically underfunded –

AM: Much less by Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher than by this government.

DH: - can come up to the level of resourcing that they need. And as I say overall across the piece, £42.4 billion this year, it’ll be 43 and a half billion pounds next year.

AM: And it’s still 0.7% down in real terms.

DH: No, we are holding –

AM: That’s the IFS figures.

DH: We are holding per pupil real terms funding and this at a time when pupil numbers are growing.

AM: We’re not going to get anywhere on this. So let’s move on to T-levels. Technical levels and you’re announcing in great detail in the news today. Now there’s been a couple of quite worrying reactions in the newspapers today. One is from Professor Alan Smithers in the University of Buckingham who’s an educationist. He says “parents should be wary of encouraging their children to take T levels. It must be absolutely clear they will be of value before kids, to employers, before kids risk their futures.”

DH: Yeah, that must be absolutely clear. Look, this is a

AM: And they’re not quite ready, are they?
DH: - This is a really big reform. It’s a programme of change which will happen over a number of years actually, probably a ten year period of reform altogether, but the biggest reform to our technical and vocational education for 70 years. And when we compared ourselves in this country to what happens in leading systems elsewhere, like Germany, like the Netherlands, like Switzerland, we have too many qualifications, too many course of study which can be confusing for young people and parents to pick their way through. Employers don’t always have confidence in them and we haven’t been teaching enough hours per week and we haven’t had businesses nearly enough involved in designing those courses and making sure there’s real workplace training.

AM: Let us have a genial consensual moment of agreement, that T- levels are in principle in a good idea.
DH: Let’s do that.
AM: And can I ask you whether you are pressing ahead too fast and worrying even your own civil servants that the system is not going to be quite ready when you roll it out?

DH: No. Look, these things do take time. These are new courses of study. Eventually there will be you know 25 new courses of study. Actually initially we’re only talking about 3 coming in in 2020 and only for around 50 colleges out of eventually many hundreds of colleges. So it is a gradual process. But you know here we are in May 2018. We started this design process a couple of years ago, there’s still two years and four months until teaching will begin and another two years after that until the first completion. So this is proceeding at the proper pace, but it is really important –
AM: But it’s quite a tough schedule. It’s a tough schedule isn’t it?

DH: - it’s really, really important that we do it and it’s really important we get it right for young people to make sure they have
the technical skills they need and our economy can drive forward its productivity.

AM: But you are pushing forward this at a very fast level, you would agree with that I’m sure. Can I ask you about one other thing however, which is would you personally be prepared to pay an extra £2,000 whatever it is to help fund the NHS?

DH: Well we are putting more money into the NHS. There’s £14 billion –

AM: I’m asking about taxes going up.

DH: - and of course that does get funded out of people’s taxes. Look, we all rely on the NHS to look after our mums and dads and to look after our children and it’s you know one of the best things about Britain and I think everybody recognises that now you know we need to be putting in resources and over time with the aging population, the chronic conditions, of course the NHS will need more resources.

AM: Now you’ve got a rival budget of course, but do you think the country is in the mood to pay more taxes to save the NHS?

DH: I think there is a recognition that the NHS faces pressures today and as I say with the aging population and chronic conditions and all the extra things that medicine can do and the more drugs that are on the market than there used to be –

AM: Is that yes?

DH: No, I think everybody realises that over time it will be important to have more resourcing and the government will come forward with a long term plan for the NHS.

Ends