

Greening fights for job as May wields axe

PM uses Cabinet reshuffle to shake up schools and promote new generation

By Edward Malnick
WHITEHALL EDITOR

JUSTINE GREENING was fighting for her job last night as Theresa May prepared to appoint a new education secretary in a drive to reinvigorate the Government's approach to schools, *The Sunday Telegraph* can disclose.

Ms Greening's successor will be tasked with leading a major push to convince voters that the Conservatives are the party of education ahead of the local elections in May.

The inclusion of a new education secretary in a blueprint for a refreshed Government comes after private polling revealed that the Tories' record in the sector was a significant factor behind the party's losses in last year's general election.

However, in an indication that Ms Greening could resist any attempt to move her, the Education Secretary yesterday posted a series of messages on Twitter heralding her achievements in the role and twice declaring: "School standards are rising."

As part of a wider renewal, the Prime Minister will also today confirm that

she is dropping plans to hold a vote on repealing the foxhunting ban.

She is separately expected to use this week's reshuffle to promote a series of younger MPs from diverse backgrounds.

Ms Greening's posts signal how the reshuffle will test Mrs May's apparently renewed strength as Tory leader after securing a "first round" agreement in Brexit negotiations with the European

Union, and putting a series of damaging Cabinet scandals behind her.

Ms Greening, like other ministers facing a downward move, could resist a demotion or threaten to cause problems for the Prime Minister on the back benches.

Mrs May is also understood to be preparing to promote a number of MPs from the 2015 intake, after accepting that the Government is in need of fresh faces, as well as a more diverse cast of ministers and aides.

The drive could see younger MPs rewarded with government aide posts after a difficult six months for Mrs May, as well as possible promotions for existing aides.

Ms Greening has been identified as



vulnerable in recent weeks, along with Greg Clark, the Business Secretary, Sir Patrick McLoughlin, the party chairman, and Andrea Leadsom, the Leader of the Commons.

Meanwhile, promotions are expected for figures such as Brandon Lewis, the immigration minister, and Dominic Raab, the justice minister. One possibility is for Mr Raab, a prominent Brexiteer, to be moved to replace Mr Lewis in the immigration brief, which would see him attend Cabinet and take over responsibility for steering the Government's planned immigration Bill through the Commons.

Yesterday, the *Telegraph* revealed that Mrs May is intending to promote Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, to replace Damian Green at the Cabinet Office, but considering delaying the
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PM strives to avoid disaster in May elections

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move because of the worsening winter crisis in the NHS.

Education has been identified as a major issue on which the Conservatives need to focus to avoid a disastrous result in May's local elections.

Drawing on a football analogy, a government source said: "Whatever you think of Greening, a new manager with energy almost always leads to a bounce if you get it right."

Mrs May's plans could see a promotion for a more junior minister at the Department for Education, such as Nick Gibb, the school standards minister, or Anne Milton, the skills minister. Both Mr Gibb and Ms Milton are highly rated by No 10 and backbenchers, and Mr Gibb is seen by some Tory MPs as more willing to take on the teaching unions in the manner of Michael Gove, the rollout of whose reforms Ms Greening is now overseeing.

The rise of MPs from the 2015 intake could see promotions for government aides such as Suella Fernandes, the head of the party's European Research Group, and Seema Kennedy, the Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary, as well as possible rewards for dis-

plays of loyalty such as the decision by Vicky Ford, the former MEP, to support the Government in a crucial vote last month over its Withdrawal Bill, despite earlier misgivings.

Mrs May will allude to the renewed focus on education in an interview with the BBC's Andrew Marr today, in which she also confirms that she has dropped a manifesto pledge to hold a vote on repealing Labour's foxhunting ban.

"If I look back at the messages that we got from the election, one is that there are a number of areas in which people were concerned about what we were proposing," Mrs May said.

"So, just as we have looked at issues on school funding, on tuition fees, on housing, we are taking forward approaches in relation to that. On foxhunting, what I can say is that there won't be a vote during this parliament."

The Prime Minister denied a suggestion that the decision to drop the promised foxhunting vote was a "cynical" move based on concerns about public fall-out, saying: "As Prime Minister, my job isn't just about what I think about something. It's about what the view of the country is."



The rise and fall Who could be coming in or out

On the up?

◆ Brandon Lewis, the immigration minister, is widely tipped for promotion.

◆ Dominic Raab, *right*, a justice minister, was a prominent member of the Leave campaign.

◆ Suella Fernandes, *right*, head of the Tories' European Research Group, could be the first of the 2015 intake to be made a junior minister.

◆ Vicky Ford, initially a pro-Europe rebel over the Government's Brexit legislation, supported

ministers last month.

On the slide?

◆ Sir Patrick McLoughlin, the Tory chairman, has been in government since 2010,

when he was chief whip.

◆ Justine Greening, *below*, the Education Secretary, is threatened as Mrs May plans a schools reboot.

