

PARTY POLICIES

Earlier this year CASE asked each of five political parties to provide a brief statement of the policies for education that they will be likely to put forward at the forthcoming General Election. The bulk of this edition of CASENotes is made up of the statements provided by The Conservative Party, The Green Party, The Liberal Democrat Party and The Labour Party. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) failed to respond to our request. We print these statements without comment and ask readers to draw their own conclusions as to how far each of the parties is likely to move our education system in the direction of the world's most enlightened and successful jurisdictions.

CONSERVATIVE



We are committed to ensuring that every family can send their child to a good local school. That's why over the past four years we've raised standards, improved discipline and given head teachers and parents the freedom to improve and expand their school.

As a result, we now have more good or outstanding schools than ever before and one million more children being taught in schools that give them the best start in life. The next Conservative Government will go even further to tackle underperformance - giving Regional Schools Commissioners the power to intervene in a failing school from day one.

Over the next five years we will continue to demand the best of our schools and give teachers, who rise early every day, go to work and turn our plans into action, the tools they need to deliver the highest standards.

The Conservatives trust teachers and heads to know what is best for their schools. That's why we've given schools greater autonomy and put professionals in the driving seat over what they teach, when they teach it as well as who is best to teach it.

Throughout this parliament we have raised the quality of teaching, through the creation of a national network of 600 teaching schools and attracting a record number of first-class graduates and teachers from other professions. Our next Government would introduce a National Teachers Service, ensuring that some of the most deprived areas of the country benefit from excellent teaching.

Alongside these reforms to teaching we've toughened the National Curriculum, so that young people leave schools with the skills they need to succeed in work or university study. The introduction of the EBacc at GCSE has resulted in a 60% increase in the number of students studying the core academic subjects that will open doors for them in the future. The next Conservative Government will go further and expect that schools enter every young person who is able for minimum of five core academic subjects.

CASE believes in a full comprehensive, locally accountable and democratic education system.

The Green Party believes firmly in a school system focused on the needs of children and free from the market competition introduced in recent years.

Our policy areas can be summarised in four key points:

- Removing market interests by integrating academies and free schools into local authority control; removing charitable status from private schools and ensuring that no school is run for profit.
- Raising standards by ensuring that all teachers are fully qualified; removing performance related pay.
- Providing a child-centred curriculum which encompasses a broad range of creative, practical and vocational subjects, and is assessed in a manner which is unobtrusive and in the interests of enhancing the learning of the individual child.
- Making schools more democratically accountable by replacing Ofsted with an independent National Council of Educational Excellence.

GREEN



We envisage an education system where teachers are supported to deliver the high standards of education they strive for, without being constrained by the overwhelming bureaucracy they currently face through excessive targets and endless assessments. We seek to give all children equal access to education which endows them with the skills and knowledge they need for adult life, rather than merely churning them through a production line of examinations and assessments. Citizenship and personal, social, health & economic education will play a vital role, and we will increase outdoor education and physical activity.

Alongside establishing a free, voluntary early years child care provision for all children, we would push back the age at which children begin formal academic learning to 6, with this being compulsory from age 7. This has been shown to benefit children greatly in countries such as Finland, who have some of the best educational outcomes in the world. Earlier years education will focus on play, social cohesion and confidence-building. Families who choose to home-school will be supported by the Local Authority with schools offering part-time attendance to home-educated pupils if desired.

The Green Party supports inclusive teaching and recognises that there are many positive benefits for everyone in being educated alongside people with a variety of needs and abilities, and this will lead to a more integrated society. The Green Party supports the principle of offering all people the opportunity to be educated in a mainstream school, whilst also recognising that the decision of whether to attend a mainstream or a special needs school is a very sensitive one and will be taken by the parent and young person together with the advice of a special needs coordinator.

A DRAFT BILL TO "RECLAIM EDUCATION"

A highly successful meeting at the House of Commons on 25th February agreed to promote a draft "Reclaiming Education" Bill designed to show how the law needs to be reshaped to begin to build a state education system that meets the needs of the 21st Century.

Details are available on the CASE website at www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk.

Working with its partners in the Reclaiming Education alliance, CASE will be seeking to use the draft Bill to demonstrate what principal reforms are needed.

LABOUR



In 2015 Labour will offer a radical departure from the last 71 years of education reform. With its expansion of state education to the working classes, the 1944 Education Act represents the pivotal progressive moment in our educational history. But Labour's 2015 analysis is that every generation of reformers has misinterpreted the Act by over-focusing upon questions of school structures.

Labour will seek to take the politics out of school type and bring universality to the powers and duties placed upon all schools, extending curricular freedoms to all schools to encourage teacher-led innovation.

We will end the Free School programme, which is enormously wasteful in an era of demographic and financial pressures.

We will devolve powers of oversight, school improvement and the commissioning of new school places to Directors of School Standards, working at a local level and accountable to local communities. Also, local authorities will be allowed to open new schools.

More importantly, we will shift our focus away from structural issues and onto what all evidence suggests works best: improving the quality of teaching and leadership. All classroom teachers will be qualified; schools will be incentivised to ensure that teachers have access to regular professional development, and continued professional development will be a condition of remaining in the classroom. A more structured system of career opportunities will allow teachers to achieve their long-term aspirations without having to leave the classroom for managerial roles.

The second misreading of the 1944 Act has been the failure to deliver effective technical and vocational education. Without doubt, this is the historic failing of English education and so many of our long-term problems stem from it. Labour will make remedying this our chief educational priority: reforming qualifications with a 16-19 technical baccalaureate; introducing more demanding apprenticeships for young people (as opposed to rebadged employee training for adults); creating dedicated Institutes of Technical Education within general FE Colleges, and developing new "gold-standard" technical degrees.

In matters of curriculum, accountability and qualifications Labour will pursue a period of relative calm. Some problems are pressing – we need to recouple AS/A levels, review admissions, introduce statutory sex and relationship education across all schools (irrespective of curriculum freedoms), and reform Ofsted to be more consistent and supportive. The inspectorate must develop a richer idea of school improvement that understands the importance of character and wellbeing and the need for a broad and balanced curriculum. We will campaign to eradicate the bullying of LGBT children and tax relief for private schools will be made conditional upon their collaboration with state schools. However, given the crisis of teacher workload, we will approach these areas mindful of the need for stability.

Labour's third priority will be to revive and refocus Sure Start upon its original intention – closing the pre-school achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. To help achieve this, we will expand access to free childcare for working parents, taking account of how the increasing blight of in-work poverty can affect outcomes in the early years.

FOOTNOTE: UKIP, David Cameron and Grammar Schools



UKIP did not respond to our request but we understand that UKIP policy is to ensure that there is "a grammar school in every town". This may explain why David Cameron has apparently changed his view, expressed in 2007, that supporters of the expansion of grammar schools were "delusional". Now, it appears, he is in favour of expanding them. The next edition of CASE-Notes will be devoted to this "sterile debate" (© D.Cameron)

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS



A world class education system is our most important tool if we are to strengthen the economy and simultaneously break down the unfair divisions which have plagued our society for too long. That is why Liberal Democrats have put education at the heart of our Manifestos for a generation, and this year's will be no different.

For far too many people, their family background still dictates their life chances. Our pupil premium, which invests money in those children who come from poorer backgrounds, is beginning to tackle the scandalous attainment gap between the rich and poor. But we must do more. Our plan for education, which will be laid out in our General Election Manifesto, stretches from cradle to college. We are the only party which

will commit to protecting the entire education budget in real terms in the next parliament, because this funding is vital if we are to provide high quality early years education, successful schools in every community and world class colleges.

If we really want to make a difference and create a more equal society, we must help children from the very start of their lives. Gaps between rich and poor children can open incredibly quickly, and that is why we must improve the quality of early years teaching and raise the status of those who work in this sector.

We will recruit more qualified staff and ensure that by 2020, every early years setting employs at least one person who holds an 'Early Years Teacher' qualification. We will also increase our early years pupil premium to £1,000 per pupil per year, so providers can really focus on helping children develop and get ready for school.

We will drive up school standards, strengthen school leadership with our Talented Head Teachers programme and provide parents with a new guarantee. Every school in the county, whatever its type, will teach the core curriculum and employ qualified teachers.

Building on the importance of QTS, we will introduce a clear, properly funded entitlement to professional development for all teachers and establish a new profession-led Royal College of Teachers.

Our Manifesto will also contain a commitment to establish an independent Educational Standards Authority, entirely removed from ministerial interference. This body will be responsible for curriculum content and examination standards, ensuring that politics is kept out of the classroom.

We would ensure that an effective, democratically accountable, 'middle tier' is there to support schools and intervene when there are problems, while allowing OFSTED to inspect both local authorities and academy chains.

We would also expand our free school meals programme to all primary school children and bring in a discount bus pass for under 21s so they can afford to get to school, college or work.

We need a properly funded education system which works for every child, and the Liberal Democrats are the only party which has set out a programme of policies which will make this a reality.

Who We Are

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