RECLAIMING EDUCATION

IMPROVING SCHOOLS 2015-20

Reclaiming Education recognises that improving children's classroom experience is essential if standards are to rise. But we believe that this cannot be done adequately if we do not have the right systems in place to support schools, teachers and children. The assumptions made by the Coalition Government need to be challenged because too many of them are damaging children.

Reclaiming Education has been promoting seven key principles that we believe should underpin policies for schools. This leaflet shows how following these principles will make a real difference to the opportunities we are providing for young people.

Too many children do not have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, for example because of the downgrading of the arts and practical subjects.

The curriculum and exams are not giving enough attention to children's personal, social and emotional development. As a result too many don't have the skills needed for university, work and adult life.

There needs to be a broad and balanced curriculum entitlement that applies in all schools. Practical and arts subjects should have equal status with others. This curriculum also needs to cover personal, social and emotional development. Exams should not just be a crude test of memory but should test the kinds of skills young people will need in adult life.

All the international evidence says that separating children according to test scores at 11 leads to lower standards.
Selection at 11 does nothing to improve opportunities for disadvantaged children.

Too many supposedly comprehensive schools find ways of keeping out children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This matters because children do less well in schools with an unbalanced intake.

All secondary schools should be comprehensive, with no academic selection. They should all be expected to take a fair cross section of their local population. Admission arrangements should be agreed and co-ordinated across whole areas rather than being set by individual schools in their own narrow interests.

Disabled children and those with special educational needs find it hard to get the right support and provision to meet their children's needs because their legal rights have been undermined including the right to a mainstream school place.

Many disabled children and young people with SEN are not getting the support they need to participate in mainstream education because of budget cuts.

The law needs to guarantee the right of disabled children and those with special needs to have their educational needs met in line with their own and their families' wishes and without discrimination in line with the Equality Act 2010. This needs to be backed up by the appropriate level of funding and support.

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Having separate systems for managing local authority schools and academies is confusing and a waste of money. So is having schools with different rights and responsibilities.

The differences in the amount of money that different schools receive to educate similar pupils are much too great.

There should be one set of regulations covering all state funded schools. There should be a single funding system that properly meets the needs of all pupils wherever they are in the country. There should be one administrative system (mostly locally based) covering all schools - this would be cheaper and easier to understand.

There is no proper system for making sure that there are the right number of school places in an area and money is wasted opening schools that are not needed. Local communities have too little say in what their schools are like.

Too many schools are isolated and have too few opportunities to learn from others. Too much emphasis on competition and league tables means that children's education is narrower than it should be.

Money for new schools should only go to where there is a need for new places. Decisions about opening or closing schools should be taken locally. Those making these decisions should be elected locally to do so.
All schools should have governors from their local community. All schools should be expected to work with others to share their expertise.

The current inspection system has lost the confidence of many teachers because it's seen as unreliable and confrontational. This is one reason why it is getting harder to recruit and retain teachers and headteachers.

Current systems for making sure schools are efficient and effective are inadequate, leading to too many cases of falling standards and an improper use of public money.

Schools do need to be monitored and poor performance or management addressed. This should be done first by working with other local schools and then by a locally managed inspection and advice service who will get to know their schools well. Ofsted should make sure local systems are working. The emphasis should be on helping schools to improve rather than on confrontation.

There are not enough new teachers being recruited and too many are leaving the profession.

Unqualified teachers are being allowed in the classroom and arrangements for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge are haphazard.

All teachers should be properly qualified (or be working towards this). All school staff should undertake regular in service training throughout their career.
Politicians need to respect teachers and let them decide how best to do their job.
The excessive workload teachers face needs to be reduced.

Follow Reclaiming Education at www.reclaimingeducation.org.uk
Find there our seven key principles and our draft Education Bill showing how to put them into practice.

The Reclaiming Education Alliance comprises: *Alliance for inclusive Education, Campaign for State Education, Comprehensive Future, Forum Journal, Information for School and College Governors, New Visions for Education and The Socialist Educational Association.*