

Positive Accountability for Schools

Parents have the right to expect fair and accurate systems of school accountability. Yet, in England, the accountability system is marked by a lack of trust.

Where schools 'own' assessment and evaluation, standards go up, not down. In countries which have adopted this kind of evaluation, such approaches have contributed to high levels of achievement for the vast majority of young people.

The next government should abolish school performance tables as has been done in Wales.

In England, an independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) should be established to replace OFSTED.

To meet the need for a summative picture of the effectiveness of the education service, two Independent assessment units should be established, one for England and one for Wales.

Schools at the Heart of their Communities

In order that every young person can achieve equality of access to good local schools, there must be a framework which encourages and supports that principle. Local authorities leading their local communities are key to that concept.

In contrast, academy status for schools has the capacity to damage local communities of schools. The effectiveness of local authority support will be undermined by academies and by pressure for expansion of foundation status.

A complete halt should be called to privatisation of essential education services at national and local levels.

The capacity of schools to select pupils by academic ability or aptitude should be abolished. Local admissions forums, involving representatives of the community, should determine school admission policies.

Above all, the National Union of Teachers calls on all parties involved in the General Election to recognise that education is at the heart of everything we value in society.

There should be specific funding from government to support collaborative arrangements between schools. In Wales, co-operative working between schools and colleges and amongst the 22 local education authorities needs to be further developed and extended.

Alongside responsibilities for funding schools and providing personal advice, all local authorities should be required by the Government to give schools access to a wide range of core services and provision. Those core services and support should include:

- > supporting teachers in raising standards and sustaining the sharing of good practice between schools;
- > providing practical policies and advice on pupil behaviour, including bullying and homophobic bullying;
- > offering professional advice and taking action where the needs of vulnerable children have been identified.

The next government should have a vital role in making equality of opportunity integral to education. Key strategies a future government should adopt should include:

- > creating and funding an entitlement to high quality and affordable childcare for all working parents;
- > personalised learning for pupils through enhanced teacher numbers;
- > a sustained programme to make all schools fully accessible to those with disabilities;
- > comprehensive race equality impact assessments of their policy proposals in making them available for public scrutiny; and
- > the provision of resources for schools and authorities that experience significant increases in the number of children of refugees and asylum seekers.

General Election 2005

bringing down the barriers





Voters are entitled to know the core values behind the education policies of the parties fighting the General Election.

Education is a fundamental human right. All children and young people have a right to high quality education. Education is central to the personal development and health of young people.

At the heart of education are teachers. Teachers inspire young people and unlock their potential. Teachers enrich their countries and societies.

As a human right, education is special. It can play a central role in the elimination of poverty.

In order for all children and young people to fulfil their human right to education, education must be a public service, publicly provided. To meet the needs of all children and young people, it must be comprehensive. Comprehensive education can contribute as much to the talented and gifted child as to the child who struggles to learn.

Schools are at the heart of their community. All parents should have access to good local schools. Choice has real meaning only when it is available to young people within schools. An entitlement curriculum and high quality teaching empowers young people to choose how and what to learn.



WHAT DOES EACH POLITICAL PARTY THINK OF THESE VALUES?

Investing in Education

Britain should achieve, as a minimum and by 2007, the average spent by all industrial countries on education. Improvements in the funding of education must be sustained. Schools should be funded according to need. This activity-led approach should provide sufficient teachers for manageable class sizes, an entitlement to a full curriculum for all young people and entitlements to planning, preparation and assessment within teaching time.

Local authorities should be funded sufficiently in order to sustain, across all services, the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

Securing Teacher Numbers in the Twenty-First Century

Each school should be required to employ a minimum number of teachers and support staff defined by:

- > maximum class size limits, set by legislation;
- > a balanced and broadly-based curriculum; and
- > the personal and social needs of young people.

Falling rolls should represent an opportunity to:

- > reduce class sizes;
- > meet the individual learning needs of children and young people;
- > expand curriculum opportunities;
- > establish productive links with parents and local communities;
- > meet the needs of vulnerable children; and
- > establish links between schools and employers.

The new government should establish targets annually for the total number of teachers and support staff that should be in employment.

Teachers' pay opportunities for career progression must be competitive with other graduate employment.

The physical and mental demands upon teachers are enormous. Current plans to increase the normal pension age for teachers from 60 to 65 should be dropped.

In the Classroom – The Teaching Profession

An all-graduate teaching profession is integral to high quality education. Teaching is highly skilled work, extending across a broad range of professional skills, knowledge and responsibility.

Continuing professional development should be an equal entitlement for all teachers.

Throughout their careers, teachers should have the time and space to reflect, research and develop their practice. Each school should receive annually a minimum funding entitlement for each teacher, of £1,000, for professional development and an entitlement to a one-term sabbatical, once every seven years of teaching.

There should be national strategies for providing continuing professional development for all teachers.

A Curriculum for the Twenty-First Century

The National Curriculum is overloaded. Its prescription reduces access to new areas of knowledge and to teaching and learning which crosses traditional subject barriers.

There should be an independent review of the 5-14 curriculum.

A new framework curriculum should set out a range of statutory entitlements for young people. It should include literacy, numeracy, science and technology, the creative arts, the humanities, knowledge of global developments, information and community technology and modern foreign languages. New approaches to cross curricular learning would be included, such as thinking skills, environmental learning, the impact of religious and secular beliefs on society, learning about industry and manufacturing, citizenship and personal and social education, including healthy living.

Integral to the new framework would be specific references to the needs of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and from socially and economically deprived backgrounds.

The next government should re-evaluate fundamentally the current government's White Paper on 14-19 education in order to provide a curriculum entitlement for young people that would remove the academic/vocational divide.

Nearly 80 per cent of teachers in Wales support the Welsh Assembly Government's abolition of compulsory national tests for 11 and 14 year olds. In England, abolishing 'high stakes' testing would contribute to high quality teaching and learning. An independent review of testing and assessment of children should be commissioned by the Government. Such a review should encourage and support assessment for learning. It should cover the current Foundation Stage alongside the 5-14 age range.