

Socialist Educational Association

General Election Briefing 2015

We need more true comprehensive schools not more selection

- Pasi Sahlberg from Finland says: “School choice does not improve the performance of education system. School choice and competition between schools are related to greater levels of segregation in the education system. “
 - The OECD says that PISA tests show that: “Eliminating system level obstacles to equity will benefit disadvantaged students, without hindering other students’ progress. So we should “defer student selection to upper secondary, manage school choice to avoid segregation and make academic and vocational tracks equivalent by improving the quality of vocational education and training.”
 - Grammar schools take only tiny numbers of pupils who receive free meals – for example 8% in Trafford and just 3% in Buckinghamshire.
 - The Fair Admissions Campaign recently identified Greycoats – where Michael Gove and David Cameron are sending their children - as being in the 1% of least socially inclusive schools in the country when compared to their local community- in other words its intake is hugely much more favoured than its local area as a whole. This is just one example of how unofficial selection by schools that claim to be comprehensive distorts parental choice.
 - The Schools Adjudicator wrote in her Annual Report that: “Schools that are their own admission authority often do not meet their responsibility to comply fully with admissions law and the Code. Admission arrangements for too many schools that are their own admission authority are unnecessarily complex. **The arrangements appear to enable the school to choose which children to admit.** ” These schools are usually academies, free schools or faith schools.
- Yet
- Theresa May has backed the possibility of a new grammar school in her constituency, despite laws which ban the creation of selective schools.
 - David Cameron has strongly backed the expansion of grammar schools after coming under pressure from right wing Tory MPs over the issue

The government has not protected school budgets despite all their claims to the contrary

- More than half of secondary schools are planning to make staff redundant, axe courses or increase class sizes to stave off financial disaster
- 48% of FE and Sixth form colleges are in financial deficit
- The schools capital budget was cut from £4.44b in 2010 to £3.1b in 2012
- The number of infant classes with over 30 pupils increased from 1.8% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2014. That is over 60000 more pupils in over-sized classes.
- This year alone adult education budgets are being cut by 24%
- There are over 600 fewer Sure Start Centres now than in 2010.

Academies and Free Schools can't all be run from Whitehall – so there are too many examples of waste and dishonesty. And there is no evidence overall that they are better than other schools.

- Andreas Schleicher from OECD, the man behind the PISA international tests says “The UK demonstrates that increasing school choice and competition does not improve standards”.
- The Education Select Committee (despite having a Tory majority) has said that “current evidence does not allow us to draw firm conclusions on whether academies are a positive force for change”.
- Comparing the most recent inspection outcome for free schools with other schools:

	O	G	RI	I
All schools	20%	60%	18%	2%
Free Schools	24%	45%	25%	6%

**O = Outstanding, G = Good,
RI = Requires Improvement, I = Inadequate**

- Today, thousands of schools are accountable only to the Secretary of State, meaning under performance and mismanagement are not spotted and challenge dearly enough. There is no strategy for school collaboration, with the Government leaving schools to operate as islands rather than incentivising effective partnerships.
- Examples of spectacular failure are the Durham Free School, Discovery Free School, Al Madinah School in Derby and Bradford Kings Science Academy
- Too many academy chains have been shown to be poorly managed with serious conflicts of interest and lavish payments made to directors and managers. The Chief Executive of the largest chain was paid £300,000 a year and enjoyed “a culture involving prestige venues, large drinks bills, business lunches and first- class travel all funded by public money”
- But the DfE resists the publication of any information about how academies and free schools are set up and how sponsors are chosen
- The academies programme had an over spend of £1billion between 2010 and 2012.
- 42 free schools have been opened in areas where there is no demand for new places costing £241 million.
- Sweden, the originator of free schools, fell from 15th place in PISA in 2003 to 38th in 2012

We need more, better qualified teachers and we need to respect their professionalism

- In 2009/10 39,010 people entered teacher training. By 2014 this had fallen to 32,543. Yet pupil numbers are rising rapidly. A crisis is coming soon.
- Universities are closing their education departments because the government is undermining their role in teacher training.
- Meanwhile other countries are raising the qualifications needed to become a teacher and are expecting more continuing training throughout teachers' careers.
- 49373 teachers left the profession in 2012-13 – a 25% increase since this government came to office
- Since 2010 average weekly hours worked by primary teachers have increased from 50.2 hours a week to 59.3 hours. For secondary teachers the increase is from 49.9 to 55.7 and for secondary heads from 57.3 to 63.3.
- Over 40,000 teachers responded to the government's “workload challenge”. But the government's response is just minor tinkering.
- 6% of teachers in academies and 13% of teachers in free schools do not have qualified teacher status.

The back to the '50's approach to curriculum and examinations will not prepare young people properly for their adult lives and it will not provide the country with the skills.

Some comments from the OECD

- Modern societies reward individuals not for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know. (OECD)
- In 2009, Singapore undertook another review that identified the 21st century competencies considered important: critical and inventive thinking; communication, collaboration and information skills; and civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills.
- the latest PISA report says “in a rapidly changing world, individuals are constantly faced with novel situations and unexpected problems that they had never encountered at school ... the ability to handle such situations and solve these problems is associated with greater opportunities for employment and with the ability to participate fully in society.”
- our schools system must also “prepare young people for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet been invented and problems that we don't yet know will arise.”

John Cridland of the CBI said in 2013, “We need young people who are rigorous, but also rounded and grounded, and possess characteristics like determination, optimism and emotional intelligence which they need for working life. Too many young

people are failed by a system which is primarily focussed on getting them through exams rather than nurturing and developing the whole person.”

But in England:

- The government has consistently downgraded speaking and listening in the curriculum.
- The new exams are just tests of memory – essential skills like how to do research have been taken out.
- Ofsted has found that Careers advice and guidance is poor in three quarters of schools since the government scrapped the independent careers service
- The government has refused to make personal, social and health education a compulsory part of the curriculum.
- The number of GCSE entries in arts and design subjects has dropped by 20% under this government.
- The number of teachers of arts subjects has fallen by 11% since 2010
- The leader of the secondary heads association said “despite all of the rhetoric about rigour, large parts of this secondary curriculum are so vague and nebulous as to be meaningless and impossible to implement.”

What Labour has to say

The days of education by diktat must come to an end.

Because the idea that our children's potential can be fulfilled if we just raise the targets, stamp our feet and demand one more heave, is now, surely, approaching its end stages.

We can begin to devolve important powers over professional standards, quality assurance, curriculum development and peer review to profession-led bodies – and we will.

We can put an end to the endless tinkering with accountability, performance measures, curriculum, assessment criteria – which we will.

All teachers will be qualified and will carry on learning throughout their career.

We will 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 well-being and the need for a broad and balanced curriculum.

We will introduce a new gold standard Technical Baccalaureate, so that if you're a 14 year-old, you know what you're aiming for in both vocational as well as academic qualifications.

And we will also redress this government's attempts to downgrade the creative subjects, like drama, art, design and technology.

Labour is the party of Sure Start and children's centres, the party that wrote the Children's Plan, and the party that reduced child poverty by 900,000; for us every child will always matter.

Labour recognises school support staff as professionals who contribute greatly to the achievements of our children and teachers within the classroom. We support and will maintain the national conditions and review body structure for teachers, and will extend this commitment to school support staff by reinstating the School Staff Negotiating Body

You can't run every school from Whitehall, which is what their decisions on academies has driven them to. The introduction of new Directors of School Standards in local areas will provide local oversight, support and challenge for all schools, and end the fragmentation of our schools system under this Government.

Labour will ensure that all schools including Free Schools, academies and faith schools serve their local communities and follow the admissions code, so every child has fair access to schools.

The next Labour Government will expand free childcare from 15 to 25 hours per week for working parents of three and four year-olds.