

# Conservative Education Priorities

## Our plan for change in schools

### Our five priorities for school reform

*A Conservative government will give every child the kind of education that is currently only available to the well-off: safe classrooms, talented and specialist teachers, access to the best curriculum and exams, and smaller schools where teachers know the children's names. A Conservative government will improve standards for all pupils and close the attainment gap between the richest and poorest.*

- 1. Move to a high quality system of teacher recruitment and training similar to those in Finland and Singapore**
- 2. Give teachers the tools and powers they need to keep order in the classroom**
- 3. Deliver more robust examinations and a more rigorous curriculum**
- 4. Open a new generation of independently run state schools**
- 5. End waste and shift spending to a national per pupil funding formula**

To achieve these goals we need to do five things:

- 1. Move to a high quality system of teacher recruitment and training similar to those in Finland and Singapore, by:**
  - Making it easier for headteachers to sack poorly performing teachers.
  - Increasing the flexibility of teacher pay so that heads can pay good teachers what they deserve.
  - Raising the bar for those entering tax-funded training so that only the best graduates can become teachers, and encouraging more highly qualified people to join the profession later in life.
  - Moving to a system where more people train to be teachers on the job.
- 2. Give teachers the tools and powers they need to keep order in the classroom, by:**
  - Abolishing appeals panels so that schools have the final say on whether to exclude a disruptive or violent pupil.
  - Giving teachers a general power of search so they confiscate weapons, electronic devices and other dangerous or disruptive items from pupils.
  - Protecting teachers who are abused or unfairly accused by pupils, and giving teachers the legal power to remove violent or disruptive pupils from the classroom.
  - Making sure that schools are subject to 'no notice' inspections and, where there are serious behaviour problems and insufficient subsequent improvement, ensuring these schools are first in line to be converted into Academies.
  - Allowing enforceable home-school behaviour contracts to be used as a condition of admission.
- 3. Deliver more robust examinations and a more rigorous curriculum, by:**
  - Replacing the national tests in the second year of primary school with a simple reading test so every parent knows their child is being taught to read properly.
  - Simplifying the national curriculum so that it focuses on core subjects and becomes more challenging.
  - Allowing all schools to prepare their pupils to sit the highest quality exams, such as IGSCCE and the International Baccalaureate.
  - Putting universities and exam boards in the driving seat for designing academic exams, and business and industry in control of designing vocational exams.
  - Creating 12 new Technical Schools, one in each of England's twelve largest cities, to deliver a higher quality technical education.
  - Publishing detailed information about the exams that pupils are entered into and the results they achieve.
- 4. Open a new generation of independently run state schools, by:**
  - Smashing down the regulatory barriers, such as planning guidance and building regulations, so that it is much easier for new providers to open a new school.
  - Moving to a per capita funding regime so that new schools get paid if they attract pupils,

- and introducing a pupil premium to direct extra funding to the poorest pupils.
- Turning the best schools into Academies, giving every school the opportunity to apply for Academy status, and extending the Academy programme to primary schools.
- Forcing schools that have been in special measures for more than a year to be taken over by an excellent Academy provider.
- Giving parents the power to take over schools that local authorities want to close.
- 5. **End waste and shift spending to a national per pupil funding formula**, by:
  - Simplifying the complex funding system so that almost all schools funding, both revenue and capital, is distributed by a single per capita funding formula.
  - Ensuring that an increasing proportion of total school spending goes directly to schools according to the number of pupils they attract.
  - Closing down expensive schemes and bodies that make no difference to standards.

## **More details on our plan for change in schools**

Labour's policy of centralisation has failed, and it has failed the poorest most, with good schools still rationed by income or house prices. We will therefore make schools accountable to parents, not the bureaucracy, and shift power where possible from the bureaucracy to heads and governors, teachers, and move control of the curriculum to universities and businesses. Where that is not possible we will simplify what politicians are responsible for.

Instead of the bureaucracy stopping teachers controlling schools, teachers will be given the powers and protection they need to stop violence and disruption. Instead of the bureaucracy controlling teachers' pay and conditions, we will give schools the flexibility they need to reward good teachers and build successful teams. Instead of the bureaucracy deciding what is taught, we will reverse the devaluation of our curriculum and exam system by giving more power over both to universities, exam boards, businesses and academia. Instead of admissions rationed by income or house prices and the bureaucracy planning school places, the supply of schools places will be free to emerge in response to the demands of parents.

These are our five priorities for reforming schools:

### **Priority 1: Move to a high quality system of teacher recruitment and training similar to those in Finland and Singapore**

#### **What we want to achieve**

Academic research is clear: the single most important factor in improving schools is the quality of teachers. In those countries that come top of the international league tables, such as Finland and Singapore, they recruit teachers from top graduates, train them seriously, and reward and respect the profession. *We will make a generational transition to the Finland / Singapore approach.* While we have many great teachers, we must do better. For example, the current hurdle of 'C' grades in English and Maths GCSE is too low and this is particularly problematic for Maths.

#### **How we will achieve this**

- We will raise the bar to get into primary school teacher training from a 'C' grade in English and Maths GCSE to a 'B'. We will introduce new specialist training courses in phonics and maths for primary teachers so that every child can get the specialist teaching that is available to children in private schools. We will raise the bar to a 2:2 as the minimum acceptable degree for a taxpayer-funded PGCE.
- We will give all heads the power to pay good teachers better. Schools, especially those struggling, must be able to attract specialists – particularly in reading, maths, and science. Evidence shows that the schools that have a great impact in poorer areas often do so by extending the hours of the school into the evening and even weekends so they can offer extra classes for struggling children (e.g in Mossbourne Academy or the KIPP schools that President Obama supports). Schools must be able to organise its teachers to do this and therefore they need the flexibility to reward teachers appropriately.
- We will create *Teach Now* to make it easier for very talented people to become teachers quickly. They will train on the job, like with the successful Teach First programme, instead of having to spend a year or more in college. We will make it easier for teachers to pursue higher level qualifications, such as masters and doctorates, in their chosen subject.
- We will support *Teach First* and associated elite teacher training programmes to expand both geographically into all parts of England and into primary schools.

### **Priority 2: Giving teachers the tools and powers they need to keep order in the classroom**

#### **What we want to achieve**

There are huge problems with violence and disruption with over 300,000 suspensions per year

and a quarter of a million persistent truants. Thousands of teachers every year are physically attacked and one in three teachers has been subject to false accusations. *We will reverse this by giving teachers the powers and protection they need.*

### **How we will achieve this**

- We will make it easier for teachers to remove violent and disruptive pupils from class without fear of legal action. We will replace the current “Use of Force Guidance”, which stops teachers taking sensible actions to restore order and discourages them from removing disruptive children from the classroom.
- The presumption will be that teachers should not be suspended unless there is a clear *prima facie* case for disciplinary action or criminal charges. If no disciplinary action or criminal charges have been brought within a month, the case will be automatically dropped. Any disciplinary action will have to be completed within one month or abandoned. Teachers will have the right to anonymity during an investigation. Police and courts must recognise that the protection of children requires a strong teaching profession that is free from fear of perpetual investigations.
- We will give headteachers a general legal power to ban, search for, and confiscate any items they think may cause violence or disruption. We will reverse the legal obligation on teachers to prove that their search and confiscation is legal. We will abolish the guidance whereby the Government “strongly advises” teachers not to search children if they object to being searched.
- We will abolish the legal requirement of 24 hours’ notice for detentions so that bad behaviour can be punished with detention the same day.
- We will have “no notice” OFSTED inspections so that inspectors can investigate schools with serious behaviour problems.
- Any school with persistent serious bad behaviour that the headteacher cannot sort out will have its leadership replaced.
- We will change the damaging rules on risk and health and safety to stop the disruption of school trips and sports by fear of lawsuits or the cost of compliance. The culture in which children are forced to wear safety goggles to play with conkers or use blu-tac must end.
- We will end the right to appeal against exclusion to independent panels, which have sent children expelled for knife crime back to the school from which they were expelled. There will be a right of appeal to the governors of the school only, and this must be completed within one month. We will abolish the Government’s new rules which force good schools to take pupils expelled from bad ones (“one in, one out”). We will abolish the rules which impose extra financial penalties on schools that expel children.
- We will ensure those disruptive pupils were placed in an environment – from boarding Academies to reformed Pupil Referral Units – where their behaviour is dealt with and they are put on a route to meaningful qualifications.

### **Priority 3: Deliver more robust examinations and a more rigorous curriculum**

#### **What we want to achieve**

Since 1998, over three million 11 year-old primary school children have not reached the Government’s basic level in reading, writing and maths – about 40 per cent of primary pupils every year. Since 1998, about four million children have failed to get five GCSEs, including English and Maths, of grade ‘C’ or better – over fifty per cent of pupils in state schools every year. About 20,000 children each year do not even get a single GCSE at grade ‘G’.

There is a large and widening gap between opportunities for rich and poor. Of the 75,000 children on free school meals each year, four out of ten fail to get even a single ‘C’ grade GCSE. Last year, only 189 of these 75,000 went on to get three As at A Level – compared with the 175 three A’s pupils produced by just one school, Eton. Independent schools, which educate just 7 per cent of pupils, produce more pupils who get three A’s at A Level than every comprehensive school put together.

Only 3 per cent of comprehensive pupils get A\*-C in English Language, English Literature, Maths, History, and the three separate sciences. Only 1 per cent of those in Pupil Referral Units get five ‘C’ or better GCSEs including English and Maths. In some areas of the country, no children sit the three separate science GCSEs. *We will reverse the devaluation of the curriculum and exam system.*

#### **How we will achieve this**

- We will replace the national tests at the end of the second year of primary with a simple reading test so that every parent knows whether their child is being taught to read properly. Schools will publish their reading scheme on their website and OFSTED will report on schools’ teaching of reading, which it does not do now.

- There has been much debate about the devaluation of our exam system, with private schools abandoning GCSEs for international exams. We will establish a free online database of exam papers and marking schemes so that parents, teachers, and academics can see for themselves how exams have changed.
- The Government has not allowed state schools to do the best international exams that private schools are switching to, such as the iGCSE. This is unfair. We will change it so all state school pupils have the freedom to do the same high quality international exams that private schools offer.
- We will give universities and subject academics more power over GCSEs and A Levels in order to reverse their devaluation.
- We will reform the National Curriculum in core subjects in our first year. All the hearings, work and documents will be open to the public, unlike now. This must be more ambitious and based upon global evidence concerning what knowledge can be introduced to children at different ages; it must be a floor, not a ceiling that limits schools' aspiration to introduce children to very challenging ideas at a young age; and it must allow schools to benefit from the extraordinary recent change whereby many of the top educational institutions are allowing students to view their content free online. Once reformed, we will stop the constant political interference in the curriculum that has devalued standards; a new Curriculum must not be re-written every year.
- League tables are causing problems and need reform. For example, the current system places Eton and other private schools bottom (because of their use of the iGCSE) and it encourages schools to focus on the C/D borderline at the expense of the best and the worst pupils. The answer is not to scrap them but to increase the range of data that is available to parents. We will publish all exam data currently kept secret by the DCSF so that web-based applications can create many new and different sorts of tables – not just one crude measure as now.
- We will treble the number of Young Apprenticeships and lift the cap on schools offering this valued course. We will build a new generation of Technical Academies to teach high quality vocational courses. The scientific and business community have made clear that the Diplomas programme has unfortunately been badly managed. We will stop the “academic” Diplomas immediately. And we will scrap the regulations forcing every school and college to offer each of the 51 types of diploma to every pupil – this will mean school leaders can decide which qualifications are appropriate for their pupils and will significantly reduce the logistical difficulties that have hampered the introduction of the qualification.

#### **Priority 4: Open a new generation of independently-run state schools**

##### **What we want to achieve**

As it stands, richer parents can either go private or move house in order to get the school they want. Poorer parents cannot do either. This means that failing schools with bad management in poorer areas just keep failing – there is no way for parents to do anything about it because their complaints can just be ignored. They are a captive audience locked into a cycle of failure. About 100,000 parents per year do not get their first choice of school. Many others in some parts of the country do not have a ‘preference’ among local schools because they consider them all to be bad. While we must give schools much greater freedom, this freedom must come with making schools more responsible to parents. So we will create a new generation of independent, free, and non-selective primary and secondary Academies. They will be funded by taxpayers but run by teachers and responsible to parents, not micromanaged by politicians. *That is the way to give parents what they want – smaller schools with smaller classes, good behaviour, great teachers and restored confidence in the curriculum.* Our long-term goal is that Academy status becomes the norm.

##### **How we will achieve this**

- We will make it much easier for educational charities, groups of parents and teachers, cooperatives and others to start new Academies. We will remove the huge amount of red tape which bureaucrats use to stop new schools opening, from planning laws to building regulations. These schools will receive the same government funding as other schools in their community for every pupil they teach.
- We will give all parents control of the taxpayers' money that the government spends on each child – now an average of about £5,000 per pupil. Parents will have the power to take their child out of a state school, apply to a new Academy, and automatically transfer the ‘per pupil’ funding from the old school to the new Academy. Good schools will grow, bad schools will change.
- We will give extra capital funding, on top of the annual per pupil funding, to fund new

Academies.

- Because the need to improve standards is most pressing in poorer areas we would give parents from poorer backgrounds a financial advantage. The amount the state would pay for a poorer child would be increased – a *pupil premium* – so that schools will work particularly hard to attract them.
- Where OFSTED judges that schools are failing to teach the basics properly, where discipline is poor and where the leadership has failed, we will take the school out of the hands of those who have let children down and install leadership teams with a track record of success. We will immediately begin the process of replacing the leadership of any school that has been in special measures for over a year by the end of the next school year (c. 100 in October 2009). These schools would all be reopened as Academies by September 2011. Thereafter, a Conservative Government would continue to replace all schools that stay in special measures for a year with Academies.
- We will let any school apply to be an Academy and the most successful schools will be automatically approved to become Academies.
- We will extend the Academy programme to primary schools.
- We will provide funding for *Teach First*, *Teaching Leaders*, and *Future Leaders* to begin work on an “incubator” that can work with established Academy chains to form new Academy management teams to take over schools identified as ‘failing’ by a revamped OFSTED, and work with their own alumni and parent groups on the foundation of new schools.
- The new OFSTED framework for assessing schools has become increasingly cluttered with 18 tick-box categories – up from eight in 1997. We will work with OFSTED to draw up a new framework that focuses on the core activities of schools: teaching and learning. Instead of the current 18 categories, schools will be assessed in only *four areas*: (1) the quality of teaching, (2) the effectiveness of leadership, (3) pupils’ behaviour and safety and (4) pupils’ achievement. Simplifying the process will allow schools to focus on getting the important things right and will give OFSTED inspectors the time to assess accurately these four core categories.

#### **Priority 5: End waste and shift spending to a national per pupil funding formula**

##### **What we want to achieve**

“There are 32,000 more teachers, 100,000 more teaching assistants and 70,000 more support staff than there were in 1997, while pupil numbers have fallen by 80,000... [S]chool spending on goods and services increased by 40 per cent over eight years to £6.8 billion in 2007/08... [S]chools spent £24.2 billion on their workforce in 2007/08 up from £14.3 billion in 1999/2000...”  
Audit Commission, 2009.

Over the past decade, the DCSF has spent huge amounts of taxpayer money on declining numbers of children, and every year Whitehall sends more than the equivalent of an entire Bible in ‘Guidance’ to schools, yet parents are less satisfied. Billions have been wasted. The current funding formula for schools is impenetrable – it operates according to formulae kept secret by the DCSF – so it is impossible to know precisely how schools are funded. The complexity makes the waste worse and undermines accountability – nobody knows who is responsible for how much money. *This waste and complexity must end.*

##### **How we will achieve this**

- We will spend less money on items such as vast centralised IT databases which always go expensively wrong. We will stop other wasteful items entirely, such as the hugely wasteful ‘National Strategies’. And we will operate other programmes differently, such as the school building programmes that waste millions on consultants and award-winning architects.
- We will give schools more control of their own budgets and end the risk of ‘clawback’, whereby the DCSF threaten to suddenly seize schools’ surpluses thus encouraging schools to spend money rather than save it (leading to heads spending on things they know they do not need in order to help their budget negotiations the next year).
- We will immediately begin to simplify the extraordinarily complex school funding system, and shift towards a system in which there is a flat rate paid by the taxpayer per pupil (with the *pupil premium* on top).