

Equity and Excellence:
*Policies for 5-19 education in
England's schools and colleges*

Policy Paper 89



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Executive Summary

A FAIR CHANCE FOR EVERY CHILD

We would:

- Introduce a Pupil Premium to close the performance gap between children from rich and poor families. £2.5bn extra would be used immediately to bring the funding of the poorest and most educationally disadvantaged 1 million children up to levels in private schools.
- Within one Parliament extend the Pupil Premium to other disadvantaged pupils, to cover around 2.5 million children in total.
- Allow schools to spend the Pupil Premium on cutting class sizes, boosting one to one tuition, financial incentives for teachers to work in the most challenging schools, extended school days or after school tuition and holiday support.
- Provide funding to cut class sizes for children aged 5-7 to private school levels - to around 15 children per class.

A BROADER CURRICULUM AND BETTER TEACHING

We would:

- Scrap the 600 page National Curriculum and replace it with a slimmed down Minimum Curriculum Entitlement.
- Radically slim down the system of national testing, and re-invest the savings in diagnostic assessment and supporting early interventions to help improve pupils' literacy and numeracy.
- Introduce a General Diploma, to be taken by all pupils, incorporating within it GCSEs, A Levels, and existing proven vocational qualifications.
- Ensure there are incentives to stretch all pupils by replacing the Government's present GCSE target which places too much emphasis on C/D borderline pupils.
- Require the General Teaching Council to develop a formal programme of continuous professional development (including a requirement for a Masters qualification) as part of a new system requiring teachers regularly to re-certify their fitness to practice, as in other professions.
- Reform teacher training by increasing learning overseen by established teachers in the classroom.
- Reform the existing rigid and bureaucratic National Pay and Conditions rules, to give schools and colleges more freedom, including in offering financial and other incentives to attract teachers - particularly in shortage subjects and in schools with the most challenging catchments, while ensuring all staff receive the minimum national pay award.

MORE GOOD SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

We would:

- Review the existing funding formula for schools and introduce a Fair Funding settlement for all institutions. We would bring funding in all schools up to the level of Specialist Schools.
- Close the unfair funding gap between pupils in school sixth forms and colleges, by immediately raising college funding to school levels, paid for by ending the Education Maintenance Allowance bonus payments.
- Take action to ensure that every neighbourhood is served by an excellent local school or college. We would give Local Authorities a clear strategic responsibility for oversight of school performance, along with appropriate powers of intervention. We would ensure that all pupils leaving primary and secondary education have the skills they need.
- Extend the freedom to innovate to all schools, while ensuring a level playing field on admissions and funding through a new model of Sponsor Managed Schools, which would replace Academies, and which would end Labour's unfair two tier system and restore strategic Local Authority oversight and commissioning.
- Strengthen school governing bodies, with: incentives for employers to release staff; additional governor training; and remuneration for Chairs of Governors on the same basis as for NHS Trust members.

FREEDOM FOR SCHOOLS, PUPILS AND PARENTS

We would:

- Pass an Education Freedom Act, to devolve power from central government to schools, local authorities and parents. The central department of Children, Schools and Families' would lose powers to micro-manage education and be more than halved in size.
- Establish an independent Educational Standards Authority (ESA) to restore confidence in standards.
- Allow parents and pupils to choose schools, and not schools to choose pupils, by stopping the establishment of new schools which select by ability, aptitude or faith, and by introducing policies to reduce radically all existing forms of selection.
- Require local authorities to run a truly independent career and course advisory service for young people
- Introduce a new pupil right to move from school to college or work-related learning provider at age 14.
- Scrap the Labour Government's plan to criminalise young people who leave education before age 18, and replace it with a more flexible entitlement for young people to take the additional 2 years of post-16 education when they wish to do so.

Introduction: Objectives and Key Challenges

1.0.1 “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine....It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given that separates one person from another.”

(Nelson Mandela)

1.1 Objectives

1.1.1 Liberal Democrats believe in freedom. A free society is one in which no person is “*enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity*” (Federal Constitution). Education can change lives: education helps make us free and is a key engine of social mobility.

1.1.2 Education should provide opportunities for every child to unlock his or her full potential. Good education would provide a skilled workforce, but good education is about more than just preparing people for work.

1.1.3 The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child states that a child’s education should be directed to: “*the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*”. We agree. A good education should ensure that people discover a love of learning, and are encouraged to see this as a life-long process. Securing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is essential. But education is also about appreciation of the arts, music, sport and the humanities, and about developing the skills to understand and contribute as citizens.

1.1.4 Liberal Democrats believe that the education system should provide all children with the skills needed to succeed in life: to think critically, use their talents creatively, develop a healthy lifestyle, good relationships and social responsibility, make well-balanced decisions and resolve conflicts, as well as providing children with the tools needed to pursue their own goals in life.

1.1.5 Our aspiration is that the school and college experience is one in which horizons are broadened and an opportunity is provided to mix with those from other social backgrounds, cultures, races and religions or beliefs.

1.2 Key Challenges

1.2.1 Success for Some

1.2.1.1 English education at its best is a match for anywhere in the world. There are many excellent schools and colleges - both within the state funded and private sectors. Many children receive a first class education.

1.2.1.2 Since 1999 there has been considerable investment in new buildings, in staffing and in IT, which has benefited many schools, though there is still a long way to go to reverse the under-investment of the previous decades.

1.2.2 The Scale of the Challenge

1.2.2.1 However, our education system still has many problems and challenges. England still lags behind much of its international peer group, in spite of a big rise in public spending. English educational performance is only average, because we have a huge tail of underachievement which

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is strongly associated with poverty and social disadvantage. Meanwhile, many affluent parents pay to send their children to private schools, which is not only expensive but saps the state funded sector of many able pupils and aspirational parents, both of which could act as peer role models for other students and parents.

1.2.2.2 Educational success in England is highly correlated with family income, and social mobility is lower than in almost any rich developed country.

1.2.2.3 Problems include:

- A recent UNICEF Report on children's wellbeing placed Britain bottom of a list of 21 developed countries. In Britain, child poverty, family breakdown and worklessness provide challenging home environments for many children.
- Around 20% of children are leaving primary school with inadequate literacy and numeracy standards.
- Over half of pupils leave school without 5 good GCSEs, including English and Maths. 85% of poor white boys fail to achieve this benchmark standard.
- A huge gap in success between rich and poor children which widens as children go through the education system. 55% of schools in the poorest areas fail to achieve the Government benchmark of 30% of children obtaining 5 A*-C GCSEs, including maths and English. This figure falls to just 3% of schools in the richest areas. School powers of selection reinforce 'selection by neighbourhood'.
- A significant number of our young people drop out of education at 16, or even effectively before then, and never participate in higher or further education, de-motivated by a very academic curriculum. Economic projections indicate substantially fewer jobs for unskilled workers.
- According to Alan Smithers: "*the poor behaviour of children in the UK compared to other countries does stand out...*"

1.2.2.4 Liberal Democrats believe that there are currently key barriers which stop children succeeding, including:

- Failure to identify and resolve educational problems in the early years.
- Inadequate and inconsistent funding for schools and colleges with high levels of educational disadvantage.
- Infant class sizes which are too large.
- Inadequate supply of properly trained and qualified teachers and too many lessons taught by teachers not trained to teach the subject
- Too many schools in which leadership and governance is not effective enough.
- Government targets and micro-management which distort priorities.
- Lack of freedom to innovate for schools and colleges.
- Inappropriate curriculum offering, which does not meet pupils' needs.

1.2.3 Standardisation and Centralisation is Failing Us

1.2.3.1 The system of intervention to address persistent school failure is still failing too many pupils. While the children of middle class families may often be moved by parents to other schools, children from deprived families often lack the same opportunities.

1.2.3.2 For 20 years, attempts to raise standards have led to an increasing centralisation of state education and to ever increasing micro-management from Whitehall. Innovation is a feature of the best schools and diversity a feature of the best educational systems yet this has been stifled by the

degree of central government control and a constant 'conveyer belt' approach to policy initiatives. Even though exam results have risen, public confidence in standards seems at an all time low.

1.2.3.3 There is a broad and growing consensus that we need to bring down the curtain on the era of standardization and centralization in English education, which started in 1988.

Success for All Children: Tackling Disadvantage, Reforming Funding, Cutting Class Sizes

2.0.1 Tackling the performance gap between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds is our number one priority. We are also determined to raise performance for all children. We aim to secure a fair funding settlement for every school and college, and we want to make sure that all pupils have the support they need.

2.1 Closing the Gap

2.1.1 We believe that two policy changes are necessary to address the gap between children from rich and poor families. Firstly, more money must be made available to schools and colleges with the most challenging intakes, to give them a real chance to overcome deep-seated educational disadvantage. Secondly, we need to ensure that every community is served by a high quality local school, and good family and social support services.

2.1.2 Money alone does not create good schools; schools with similar budgets and challenges can achieve very different outcomes. That is why Chapters 3 and 4 set out plans for a broader and more challenging curriculum, a high quality teaching workforce and better governance for all schools.

2.2 The Pupil Premium and Schools' Funding

2.2.1 Gordon Brown's objective to raise per-pupil funding in state funded schools to the private school level of 2005/06 is a very modest and misguided objective. Modest, because it may take until 2020 to achieve, by which time per-pupil funding in the private sector will have moved significantly higher; misguided because additional money needs to be targeted on those pupils in greatest need.

2.3 Pupil Premium

2.3.1 To give schools the ability to tackle disadvantage and to close the performance gap, Liberal Democrats would introduce a Pupil Premium, which would increase the funding for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.3.2 This Pupil Premium would apply to all eligible students, whichever school or college they attended up to the age of 19 - giving schools and colleges in more affluent areas a stronger incentive to take in more of these children. This Pupil Premium would be available to the school which each disadvantaged pupil attended. The Pupil Premium could not be used as a "voucher" through being "topped up" for use in the private sector, as its purpose is to strengthen education in the maintained sector and not to act as an exit route from it.

2.3.3 The Pupil Premium would target disadvantage more effectively than the present system, in which there can be huge differences (of up to £1,000 per pupil) between the budgets of schools with very similar levels of need. Nearly half of pupils receiving Free School Meals do not go to a deprived school or live in a deprived area. Area based targeting therefore misses a large proportion of deprived pupils - including in many rural areas.

2.3.4 The Pupil Premium would initially be set at around £2.5bn per year, which would allow us to bring the funding of the most disadvantaged pupils - those entitled to free school meals - up to the average level of funding in private day schools. This would involve extra money for schools. The majority of extra funding would come from taking those above median earnings out of tax credits. This £2.5bn would initially help around 1 million children.

2.3.5 Liberal Democrats would consult on those groups which would receive the Pupil Premium, at whom it would be targeted and at what levels. There is a strong rationale for the Pupil Premium being set at the highest levels in the primary school age range.

2.3.6 We believe that the 5-16 Pupil Premium should initially include those:

- Entitled to Free School Meals.
- With medium and low level special needs.
- In the care of Local Authorities.
- With English as a Second Language (for 1 year only, after which children tend to catch up quickly).

2.3.7 By the end of one Parliament, we would expand the Pupil Premium's coverage to include other children from low income households where one or more parent is in employment. This might include, for example, households in receipt of Working Tax Credit. We would consider the scope for using systems such as MOSAIC¹ to identify these children. We expect 2.5 million children to receive the wider-reaching Pupil Premium, and almost all of England's 23,500 schools to benefit.

2.3.8 Above age 16, the Pupil Premium would be targeted on those with Special Educational Needs and low attainment, in both schools and colleges. We would expect the number of over 16 year olds receiving the Pupil Premium to fall over time as the benefits of early intervention work through.

2.3.9 We would re-direct other savings from within the department's budget to cover the £5bn annual cost of this wider Pupil Premium.

2.3.10 The Pupil Premium would be set nationally and it would top up a national per-pupil base funding figure.

Pupil Premium: Making the Difference

2.3.11 Schools would be free to decide how to use the Pupil Premium to deliver improved education - it would not be ring-fenced to spend on each pupil who attracted it. Schools would be held accountable by parents, the Local Authority and OFSTED for using their resources in sensible and innovative ways.

2.3.12 Examples of how the Pupil Premium might be spent are:

- More one-to-one tuition - particularly to deliver good basic literacy and numeracy. Evidence indicates that early investment in Reading Recovery and in numeracy can be highly effective if sustained.
- Additional staff to help children and parents in challenging home environments, such as Home/School Support Workers.
- Smaller class sizes or small nurture groups for vulnerable children.
- A longer school day and more after school activities.

¹ Mosaic is a "geodemographic" classification which analyses individuals' postcodes using 400 variables derived from the census and other sources but which are relatively simple to understand.

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- Saturday classes and holiday time provision.
- Higher pay and 'hard to serve' bonuses to attract the best teachers to the most challenging schools.

Pupil Premium and Children in Care

2.3.13 Children in Care would receive the highest possible level of the Pupil Premium, as this cohort represents some of the most disadvantaged children in our society. This would enable Local Authorities, acting in loco parentis, to have the resources to provide the best education possible.

2.3.14 We support the appointment of a 'Virtual Headteacher' to oversee the education of children in care in their authority, and those children in the authority's care who receive their education outside of the authority.

2.3.15 Where Local Authorities wish to use the enhanced Pupil Premium to fund services for specific looked-after children in the private sector - for boarding or day provision - they would be free to do so, as long as it is judged by the 'Virtual Headteacher' to be in the best interests of the child. We would also allow Local Authorities to use the additional higher element of the Pupil Premium for these children to fund child-specific services.

2.4 Funding Reform: A Fairer Deal

2.4.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the existing national schools funding formula is unfair and arbitrary. We believe that there needs to be a fundamental review of schools funding which should consider:

- A baseline entitlement for each pupil, set against the costs of delivering the core schools provision.
- A local costs top-up for high cost areas - typically, where it costs more to recruit teachers.
- The relationship between funding levels in primary and secondary education.

2.4.2 The Pupil Premium would then be paid over and above these amounts. Local Authorities would be free to add in other resources, with enhanced powers to raise revenue through a fair Local Income Tax, as a replacement for the unfair Council Tax.

2.4.3 It is unfair that schools which have not or cannot obtain Specialist School Status receive lower funding. We would raise the funding of all schools to the Specialist School level and deliver a fairer deal for colleges (see Section 2.8).

2.4.4 We would massively decentralize the schools funding which is currently controlled by the Westminster Government - almost £1 in every £5 of schools' funding. Some of this money would be passed directly to schools, in their per-pupil payments. Some would be devolved to local authorities - to enable them to carry out their enhanced functions.

2.4.5 Central government would cease to have any role in approving individual school capital projects. We would devolve responsibility for major capital works to local authorities, whilst continuing to allow individual educational establishments to manage budgets for smaller capital projects.

2.5 Smaller Class Sizes

2.5.1 Evidence indicates that there are clear benefits from reducing class sizes for children aged 5-7. Yet English class sizes are some of the highest in the developed world. As well as the Pupil Premium, we would provide the funding to reduce infant class sizes to private school levels of around 15. We estimate the revenue cost would be some £500m per annum, over and above the Pupil Premium costs. Only 1 in 20 children aged 5-7 are taught in classes with fewer than 20 pupils. Over 1 million children of this age are taught in classes of 25 or more.

2.6 Special Educational Needs

2.6.1 Around 18% of all pupils in England are categorized as having some sort of special educational need - 1.5 million children. This is one of the highest percentages in the developed world. 3% of children (250,000) have a Statement of SEN, and around 1% of children (90,000) are in special schools.

2.6.2 We would make sure that children with SEN get the help that they need by:

- Guaranteeing a multidisciplinary diagnostic test at age 5 for all children (taking account of earlier assessments) and again in the first year of secondary education and for young offenders entering custody, with an entitlement to high quality early intervention for those children at risk of falling behind - and a sufficient number of health and educational staff trained in these specialties. We would train all staff in schools to recognise SEN and to provide appropriate support.
- Separating the process of assessment and funding for statements within local authorities, so that there is greater confidence that needs assessments are not being driven by funding availability.
- Establishing a national or regional fund to assist local authorities with very high cost statements.
- Ensuring that there is proper support for inclusion and low/medium special needs through the Pupil Premium.
- Making sure that full information is available to families, with clear signposting to appropriate support services and proper communication between health and educational professionals and families.
- Incorporating SEN management as an indicator in the new School Report Scorecard.
- Requiring Local Authorities to provide access to suitable places in Special Schools for those who require this. We would end the presumption in the Government's 2004 SEN Strategy that "*the proportion of children educated in special schools should fall over time*".
- Encouraging the co-location of special schools alongside mainstream schools with a similar age cohort.
- Strengthening the role of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in the primary and secondary curriculum, monitoring at PCT level, and providing a continuum of services around the family.

2.7 Education Leaving Age

2.7.1 England has a real problem with the proportion of children who leave education at 16, often with very poor basic skills and qualifications. Many of these young people are not in employment, education or training beyond 16 or 17 - they are more likely than most children to end up on low pay, unemployed or in crime. The Government has legislated to oblige every young person to stay in education and training up to age 18. But many of these young people have already dropped out of education by 16 - so it is not obvious that they will be more willing to comply post 16. For many young people who are alienated by formal education, employment and apprenticeships are often the best routes. Government plans risk reducing employment opportunities for 16 and 17 years olds - by imposing new duties on employers.

2.7.2 The real challenge in getting more children to stay on in education is improving the curriculum offer to make it more engaging for young people, raising standards so that by age 16 all young people have the skills and motivation to continue.

2.7.3 There are other young people for whom compulsion may not be suitable, including teenage mothers and young people with mental health problems and other serious illness.

2.7.4 Liberal Democrats would not therefore proceed with the Government's plan to criminalize young people who leave education at age 16.

2.7.5 Instead we would:

- Ensure local authorities maintain an independent, intensive intervention and support service for the young people most in need of assistance.
- Give every person the entitlement to an additional two years of free education or training, up to and including a first Level Three qualification, to be taken at a time of their choosing after they leave Year 11.
- Improve funding for support services for teenagers, including drug and alcohol rehabilitation and mental health services.
- Improve vocational education and accredited employer-based training so as to give young people real choices to pursue options which they enjoy and value.

2.8 Fair Funding for Colleges

2.8.1 There is, at present, inadequate funding for the colleges on which so many 16 and 17 year olds rely. It is indefensible that colleges receive less funding for each young person on equivalent courses than do schools. We would immediately close that funding gap, and deal with other injustices, so that, for example, young people who should be entitled to free meals still receive them if they move from the schools sector to colleges.

2.8.2 We believe that additional funding is necessary to provide proper support for young people who want to carry on in education and training post 16, but have high levels of social, emotional or health needs.

2.8.3 The Education Maintenance Allowance is having some impact on the staying on rates in the lowest income households, but we are not convinced of the effectiveness of the EMA bonuses for attendance and work completion and we would abolish such bonuses. We would re-direct the saving of £100m per year into the colleges sector to deliver fair funding.

2.8.4 As a condition for this additional funding, we would expect colleges to continue to develop their existing financial support schemes, aimed at offering support to young people in particular need and we would ensure that the funding mechanism provides for this in a fair way.

Raising Pupil Achievement: Reforming the Curriculum, Improving Teaching

3.0.1 An Education Freedom Act would give teachers the freedom they need to raise pupils' achievement by fundamentally reforming the over-prescriptive curriculum, qualifications and testing regime and we would devolve power from central government to a fully independent Educational Standards Authority.

3.1 Curriculum

3.1.1 We would scrap the existing, overly prescriptive, 600 page National Curriculum, and replace it with a light touch 20 page 'Minimum Curriculum Guarantee'. This would enable each school to make judgements about the best curriculum to offer its pupils. The Minimum Curriculum Guarantee would specify the core educational provision which every school would have to make available to each child from age 7 to age 19. It would include a guaranteed entitlement to study at least one foreign language and separate sciences. We would set down broad guidance on religious education at a national level and ensure that religious education in state funded schools educates young people about people's beliefs and practise in terms of the main religious belief systems. It should not specify what pupils themselves should believe and practise.

3.1.2 However, faith schools would still be free to offer their pupils religious instruction in the schools' own faith, subject to pupils being able to opt out where they have attained the maturity to make that decision for themselves and subject to parental decision until that point.

3.1.3 Technology, school federations, flexible teaching models, and innovative learning practices, should enable schools and colleges to provide access to as wide a curriculum offer as possible. Local authorities could support access to this wide range of options by publishing a single prospectus for their locality, as currently happens in some areas for 14-19 courses.

3.1.4 We remain critical of the over-prescriptiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, consistently arguing that that some of the Early Learning Goals are inappropriate. The EYFS framework must accommodate a range of educational approaches and offer sufficient choice and flexibility. We agree with its principles and aims but support a reformed EYFS continuing to the end of Key Stage 1. A key element of effective teaching in the early years is ensuring that child-initiated ideas and interests inform adult-led activities. Activities for the individual child must be developmentally appropriate such that children develop their learning, personal, social and physical skills and extend their creativity.

3.2 General 14-19 Diploma

3.2.1 The Liberal Democrats would introduce a new General Diploma for all children in state funded schools and colleges to create a 14-19 qualifications framework that gives real choice to young people and meets the needs of employers and universities.

3.2.2 In 2004 the Tomlinson Report concluded that the post 14 curriculum was too narrow for many children; that there was insufficient attention to ensuring basic literacy and numeracy; and insufficient 'stretch' for the ablest pupils. Many children are turned off by the existing heavily academic curriculum, while schools and colleges feel that the existing academic curriculum is stale, narrow and 'dumbed down'.

3.2.3 We believe the Government made a mistake in introducing 17 new Diplomas at 4 different levels, to compete alongside the existing A-levels, GCSEs, and other qualifications, while threatening good existing 16-19 vocational qualifications. This can already be seen in the low take up of the new diplomas and in the increasing prevalence of qualifications such as the International GCSE, the Cambridge Pre-U and the International Baccalaureate.

3.2.4 Pupils would typically start our General Diploma at age 14, with existing academic, vocational and apprenticeship qualifications being incorporated as its building blocks. It would be awarded at different grades at ages 16 and 18. The ESA would be responsible for laying out the framework of points awarded to each qualification block within the General Diploma. While internal assessment could be part of some, especially vocational, courses as at present, external assessment would remain central to these qualifications.

3.2.5 We would maximize choice, by allowing students to take both academic and vocational courses within a single General Diploma.

3.2.6 To facilitate greater access to vocational education, we would legislate to give pupils the right to move from school to college or work-related learning provider at age 14 and put in proper support arrangements for such pupils and the people teaching them.

3.2.7 All students would be required to achieve basic levels of literacy and numeracy, and those who are staying in education but who had not obtained these, would be obliged to continue studying these subjects post 16.

3.2.8 Local authorities should commission a truly independent career and course advisory service for young people, which is informed by the needs of local employers.

3.3 Testing and Assessment

3.3.1 We would overhaul the existing testing and assessment regime so that testing and assessment is focused on pupil needs, and not just on school accountability. In doing so, we would address concerns about the quality of the assessments and the effects on standards of 'teaching to the test' and narrowing of the curriculum.

3.3.2 We led the calls to scrap compulsory national Key Stage Tests at age 7 and 14. We would scale back Key Stage 2 tests at 11, so that only the core skills of English and maths are tested.

3.3.3 We believe that the reliability of KS2 tests could be improved, and costs reduced, by using a combination of internal teacher assessment (with external moderation) and external testing. We believe that such changes would address present concerns regarding the impact of tests on the curriculum and the quality of information derived from the tests. The existing schools testing regime costs over £600m per year. The money saved from these changes would fund a new multidisciplinary diagnostic assessment (see point 2.6.2).

3.3.4 We oppose the introduction of the 'Single Level Tests', which could lead to a further proliferation and institutionalization of external testing in schools - with yet more teaching to the test.

3.3.5 Each school should have a Chartered Educational Assessor who would be accountable for the quality of internal assessment. This would support the school in improving the quality of assessment and facilitate the sharing of good practice.

3.4 Measuring Progress

3.4.1 The publication of national test results is an entitlement for parents and young people. However, existing league tables are crude and often say more about a school's local neighbourhood than the quality of teaching and learning that goes on there. We would scrap them.

3.4.2 We want to give parents more meaningful information by creating 'peer groups' of schools with similar characteristics (e.g. pupils on free school meals, English as a second language, etc) so that their performance can be meaningfully compared.

3.4.3 We welcome plans by the Government to develop a School Report Scorecard. The gradings should not be based solely on external results, but on: performance in relation to comparable peer schools; value added; performance in meeting the needs of SEN pupils; and wider educational provision, including in music, sport, the arts and personal development.

3.4.4 To improve the credibility and quality of data on changes in educational standards over time, the new Educational Standards Authority would carry out random sampling tests of literacy, numeracy, science and ICT each year amongst three age cohorts. These statistics would be published to establish beyond reasonable doubt what was happening to educational standards - ending the perpetual debate about 'dumbing down'.

3.4.5 As part of developing the General Diploma we would introduce a new way of measuring individual standards which would take the average points total achieved per-pupil for their 8 best GCSE or equivalent results, including English and maths. This would replace the existing target of 5 A*-C GCSEs, including and excluding maths and English, which puts excessive focus on the C/D borderline, and discourages schools from giving attention to improving the performance among both lower and higher performing pupils.

3.4.6 We are not willing to underwrite a culture of low aspiration and achievement in schools in deprived areas. It is unacceptable that so many schools have so many pupils who fail to meet basic standards and it is understandable that Governments want to concentrate interventions on these schools. However, the crude 'naming and shaming' of the National Challenge, which judges schools only against the benchmark of 30% 5 A*-C GCSEs, risks deterring good staff from going to challenging schools.

3.5 Teachers: Attracting the Best

3.5.1 The quality of teachers and school leadership is the most important educational resource of all. Countries such as Finland, which leads many education league tables, have highly trained and qualified teaching staff drawn heavily from the top 10% of graduates. Yet, in this country, policy issues relating to teaching are often relegated to the sidelines. For most of the last half century, there have been insufficient high quality teachers to meet the demands of all schools. Some teachers have poor qualifications and it is difficult to attract candidates in shortage subjects, such as maths and science. It has become more difficult to attract male teachers and the trend is towards teaching being a predominantly female profession - perhaps with consequences for the education of boys.

3.5.2 More positively, it is clear that there are many very able young people who are motivated to teach. The Teach First programme now attracts applications from 5% of Oxbridge candidates who achieved a 2:1 or better.

3.5.3 We would:

- Initiate a major drive to attract more high quality graduates into teaching.
- Improve teacher training, by increasing the size of the popular school-based Graduate Teacher Programme (which is currently budget limited), while improving the PGCE.
- Support the expansion of 'Teach First', and develop 'Teach Next' as a route into teaching for those moving from other professions, particularly into the 'shortage' areas.
- Relate Qualified Teacher Status more closely to the subject or stage for which the teacher trained, with 'Emergency Status' granted for a limited period to allow schools to retrain teachers.
- Ensure all teachers are appropriately qualified to teach the subject they are required to teach.
- Reduce the number of time-consuming, top-down initiatives by devolving more powers down from Central Government and giving more freedoms to schools.

3.6 Teachers: Continuous Professional Development

3.6.1 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is central to our plans for raising standards in schools but is too often an afterthought or consists only of a briefing for teachers on the latest Government initiatives. We need a major expansion of CPD, including:

- A CPD Entitlement of £500 per teacher per year, with monies shifted from existing 'top-down' initiatives. Head teachers would control this budget but be expected to consult with staff over the provision of appropriate training.
- More CPD based in schools and colleges, with special requirements and support for those teaching outside their own areas of expertise, for example in shortage subjects.
- An entitlement to CPD for support staff in all schools and colleges.
- Ensuring that all statements of SEN include an entitlement for those teaching the child to have access to appropriate training.

3.6.2 We would ask the General Teaching Council to develop a formal programme of continuous professional development (including studying for a Masters qualification) as part of a new system requiring teachers periodically to re-certify their fitness to practice, as in other professions.

3.7 Teacher Pay: Attracting and Rewarding the Best

3.7.1 Decent salaries and the prospect of rapid promotion are important if the best people are to be attracted into teaching. Although teacher salaries are above average for female graduates, they are below average for male graduates.

3.7.2 The existing teacher pay scales and the national pay agreement give insufficient freedoms to schools to pay more to attract and retain the best staff. They effectively discriminate against schools and colleges in disadvantaged areas where there can be a real problem in attracting teachers. That is why so many challenging schools have to rely on supply or substitute teachers, or teachers who lack specialist degrees in the subject they are teaching.

3.7.3 We would:

- Ensure that teacher salaries remain competitive.
- Reform and simplify the existing highly complex and bureaucratic National Teacher Pay and Conditions rules, to give more freedom, including offering financial and other incentives to attract teachers - particularly in shortage subjects and in the most challenging areas. All establishments would still be required to deliver at least the baseline national pay increase to staff, and the basic minimum pay rates.

- Empower governing bodies to regularly review headteachers' performance in order to ensure that the best are rewarded and that underperformance is addressed.
- Put in place a Pupil Premium to fund schools in disadvantaged areas to allow them to pay more to attract and retain high quality staff in the most challenging schools.
- Ensure that there are fast-track routes for promotion to top jobs and that this is based on ability and not on time-serving.
- Ensure that Staff Associations are recognised by all state funded schools.

3.8 Head Teachers and Principals: A Vital Resource

3.8.1 Good head teachers and principals are essential if we are to have high performing schools and colleges. The existing generation of headteachers and principals is approaching retirement age, and there are real concerns about finding replacements, particularly in primary schools.

3.8.2 We would recruit a new generation of school and college leaders by:

- Ensuring that leadership pay is set to reflect the huge responsibilities, and ask the School Teachers' Review Body to review the present pay levels for headteachers in smaller schools, which often do not reflect the additional responsibilities.
- Identifying at an early stage those with the talents to take on headships and the role of Principal - and provide fast-track routes to these top posts. Local authorities and governors would be expected to provide career development opportunities including leadership training.
- Reducing the burden of central government initiatives and ensuring that the systems of targets, inspections and accountability are fair and strike the right balance between constructive support and necessary accountability.
- Expecting Local Authorities to help facilitate school federations where this is requested by schools and colleges, in order to spread the benefits of high quality leadership, particularly for smaller schools, and to pool scarce management resources.

Delivering Good Schools and Colleges

4.0.1 There is still a huge gap between the performance of educational institutions, which is not explained simply by differences in pupil intake. The best schools and colleges generally have the same characteristics: strong leadership, good governance, quality staff, high aspirations, strong discipline, and willingness to innovate. We need to do more to ensure that all parents and pupils have access to high quality local schools and colleges.

4.0.2 The response of Labour and Tory Governments to these challenges has been remarkably similar. The last 20 years have seen an era of standardisation and centralisation - the emergence of a nationalised system of education, micro-managed from Whitehall. Since 1997, there have been over 16 Bills, 64 Green and White Papers, over 370 consultation papers and 1650 new regulations. That has been one new government measure every two days.

4.0.3 This approach has been deeply damaging. It has entrenched instability, wasted public funds, undermined the essential role of local authorities in driving up standards, and stifled real innovation. It has led to arbitrary differences between the freedoms and funding of different schools, without any coherent justification and has undermined co-operation between institutions. It has failed to ensure that all communities are served by good schools and colleges, and failed to break the link between social class and educational outcomes.

4.0.4 The Conservative 'alternative' to this strategy sounds remarkably like more of the same, with a continuing focus on centralised 'traditional' solutions. In addition, the Conservatives are promising to raise standards largely through creating more school places, by diverting up to £4.5bn away from the upgrading of existing schools. This strategy fails to take into account the limitations of choice and surplus places in raising standards.

4.0.5 The Liberal Democrat approach is different. We believe that improvement would be achieved by:

- Giving all schools more real autonomy and freedom to innovate.
- Giving more parents a genuine choice of good local schools and colleges, by improving governance and leadership.
- Reducing micro-management by Whitehall, and giving Local Authorities clear responsibilities and powers to drive up standards.
- Maximising the potential for partnership working, not least to deliver a 14-19 curriculum which offers real choice.
- Restoring confidence in educational standards, through an Educational Standards Authority.
- Ensuring that schools work more closely with other children's services to tackle the causes of poor performance and to improve parenting.

4.1 Education Freedom Act

4.1.1 The Liberal Democrats would pass an Education Freedom Act. This would devolve powers from Whitehall to schools and local authorities, as well as to an independent Educational Standards Authority. The Education Freedom Act would redefine the relationship between central government, local government and schools - as well as defining the rights and freedoms of parents and pupils.

4.2 Central Government

4.2.1 The central Whitehall department would be dramatically reduced in size - by around 50%. The 18% of the education budget held nationally would be devolved to schools and local authorities. Central initiatives would be scrapped.

4.2.2 In future, Central Government's role would be limited to:

- Setting high level education performance measures.
- Defining the Minimum Curriculum Guarantee.
- Setting the levels of Minimum Pupil Funding and Pupil Premium.
- Defining, through legislation, the broad freedoms and responsibilities within the educational system.

4.3 Educational Standards Authority and School Inspections

4.3.1 An Educational Standards Authority would be established to take over much of the work of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, as well as OFQUAL, the new Joint Advisory Council for Qualifications Approval, and the Schools Commissioner. This would be completely independent of Ministers, and accountable through a parliamentary Select Committee.

4.3.2 This body would limit the short term interference by politicians. It would make an objective assessment of changes in educational standards over time, commission research into best educational practice, and oversee OFSTED. It would be empowered to direct awarding bodies, to ensure the maintenance of standards.

4.3.3 The Educational Standards Authority would have strategic oversight for all national tests, and it would be charged with carrying out a sampling process across all schools on an annual basis to assess changes in educational standards over time. This would help restore public confidence, and would ensure that debates about education are informed by facts and not prejudice.

4.3.4 Local authorities would take on responsibility for oversight of standards in schools and colleges. OFSTED as a part of the Educational Standards Authority would concentrate on schools and colleges with the weakest performance and would inspect other institutions less frequently. It would also hold local authorities to account for their work in raising standards. OFSTED would also be charged with giving constructive advice to struggling schools, and helping to advise on best practice.

4.4 A New Role for Local Government

4.4.1 Local Government would have new and more powerful strategic powers to enable councils to deliver their statutory role as strategic commissioners for services to children in their locality. We want local authorities to act as champions of children, parents and families, ensuring that the delivery of education is not dependent only on individual institutions. We would give councils the powers they need to fulfil this role.

4.4.2 Local Government would be:

- Strategic commissioners of services for children 0-19, including local education services.
- Responsible for ensuring there are sufficient 5-19 school and college places and that pupils can access their full curriculum entitlement within the locality.
- The first tier of accountability for all state funded schools and colleges, including all schools presently within the Academies and Trust Schools programmes. Local Authorities

would be enabled to consolidate the School Improvement Partner model in their own arrangements for school support and improvement.

- Empowered to intervene where state funded schools are failing.
- Charged with purchasing or providing school support services such as those presently provided through 'National Strategies', where this responsibility cannot be devolved to schools themselves.
- Co-ordinator of children's social and welfare services, supporting schools and colleges.
- Charged with strategic oversight of local admissions, to ensure adherence to the Admissions Code.
- Responsible for ensuring that all pupils have access to independent, objective advice at key change points in their educational career.
- In control of the principal programme of capital investment to maintain high quality buildings and to provide for new capacity.
- Responsible for the assessment and, where necessary, commissioning of support for children with higher levels of SEN.
- Able to top up the funding levels for children from the local authority area, above and beyond the levels fixed by the Pupil Premium.
- Overseen in its functions by the Audit Commission and OFSTED.
- Responsible for ensuring compliance by all schools with equality and human rights legislation.

4.5 Real Choice for Parents and Pupils

4.5.1 Liberal Democrats believe in choice. It is one of the key freedoms in a liberal society. The UN Charter of Human Rights enshrines the basic freedom for parents to choose the right education for their children - including home education. It should include the power to choose to apply to any school which meets the criteria to provide state funded education and to be admitted if there are sufficient places, and to do so without a requirement for any top-up payment.

4.5.2 The priority for most parents and pupils is to be able to attend an excellent local school or college. Consequently, ensuring that there is an excellent school or college in every area is our priority. It should not be necessary for parents to pay to access the private sector, or to move house or travel large distances, to be able to secure a top quality education. However, we also wish to expand choice, and if there is to be real choice, each neighbourhood must have, where viable, more than one excellent school or college, with places available in more than one. Real choice must also mean enabling schools to offer different approaches to education and a greater choice of curriculum - often in partnership with other schools and colleges. The parental right of choice is also an important mechanism for holding schools to account, and ensuring pressure for improvement.

4.5.3 Of course, choice is presently not open to all parents and pupils. In particular, the OECD found (Economic Surveys, 2007) that: "it is not clear that pupils and parents in the lowest socio-economic classes are able to take advantage of school choice.....children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are much less likely to make the move to a better school than children from wealthier backgrounds."

4.5.4 Those who have difficulty exercising real choice often do so because there is not the spare capacity which allows any real choice of school. Situations in which this particularly applies include: in rural areas; in communities in which popular local schools are heavily over-subscribed; and where parents cannot afford to move into the catchment area of a preferred school or pay for transport to a more distant establishment.

4.5.5 These impediments to real choice mean that we have a responsibility to bring first class schools and colleges to local communities - including by improving school leadership and governance, raising aspirations, encouraging innovation, and ensuring good discipline and teaching.

4.6 Choice for Parents, Not Selection by Schools

4.6.1 We believe that parents should be able to choose schools, and not the other way around. There is no evidence that selective educational systems improve standards.

4.6.2 We would therefore no longer permit any new state funded school to be established which uses selection by ability, aptitude, or faith, or permit any existing school to start to use such selection. We would remove the right to select by aptitude from all state funded schools.

4.6.3 We would remove the existing obligations on Local Authorities to carry out expensive and complex local balloting about the future of Grammar Schools. It would be for individual Local Authorities to decide whether the existing 164 Grammar Schools should be allowed to select by ability. We would empower local authorities to require existing Grammar Schools to enter partnerships with other local state funded schools.

4.6.4 We would give local authorities the responsibility to oversee fair admissions in their areas, and allow them to ban practices such as banding by ability where these practices are being used to disadvantage young people from deprived neighbourhoods, as well as giving them the power to insist on the use of such banding where that serves to improve choice for such young people.

4.6.5 We would take action to make state funded faith schools more open to all children in their local community (see below).

4.6.6 We recognise that rural areas often have less access to choice than urban areas and would seek to mitigate the affects of this through encouraging schools and colleges to use technology to open up choice, alongside other measures such as supporting rural transport through the policies contained in Policy Paper 85, *Fast Track Britain* (September 2008).

4.7 Faith Schools

4.7.1 In England, around one third of schools are faith schools - 6,300 primary schools (36%), and around 600 secondary schools (18%); a mixture of voluntary controlled schools which are local authority schools and voluntary aided schools.

4.7.2 Liberal Democrats respect the fact that many parents want to send their children to schools which are run by faith groups and/or have a faith ethos. The option of faith schools is consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects the right of parents to ensure “*such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions*” but case law has demonstrated that this does not require the state to provide religious schooling for any parent who wishes it.

4.7.3 As with many community schools, many faith schools deliver an excellent quality of education and parents also see them as providing a values-based education which is often highly prized.

4.7.4 While we acknowledge that many ‘Faith’ Schools are in practice open to all of the local community, where they are not we recognise the restriction of the rights of other parents who find that they cannot get their children into a taxpayer-funded school because of a faith requirement.

4.7.5 We are also concerned that faith-based admissions (where that leads to racial and religious segregation of children) could be socially divisive, particularly in the context of the greater ethnic and religious diversity of 21st century Britain. We believe that state funded schools should not be places that reinforce existing divisions within and between communities. We recognise that many faith schools do not apply faith based admissions criteria but are no less faith schools as a result.

4.7.6 We recognise that all teachers (whatever their beliefs) have a duty to uphold the ethos of the school, but we believe that no teacher should run the risk of having their career options narrowed on the basis of their religious beliefs or their lifestyle. Nor should pupils be denied access to the best teachers as a result of discrimination on the basis of religion. Liberal Democrats have always opposed the exemption that exists in employment law allowing faith schools to reserve a proportion of posts for teachers who profess a specific religion.

4.7.7 Balancing these freedoms, rights and aspirations is not easy. It requires compromises. Liberal Democrats would:

- Allow parents to continue to choose faith-based schools within the state funded sector, and allow the establishment of new faith schools.
- Ban selection by faith from new faith schools, and require all existing state-funded faith schools to phase out selection by faith in admissions within five years.
- End the opt out from employment and equalities legislation for staff in faith schools, except those responsible for religious instruction.
- Require schools who choose to hold assemblies to ensure that any act of collective worship is optional for pupils who are old enough to decide for themselves and otherwise for parents.

4.8 Delivering Good Schools and Colleges

4.8.1 We believe that good schools have similar characteristics - strong leadership and governance, good staff, high aspirations, firm discipline, and a willingness to innovate. There are good schools of all types - Community schools, Colleges, Academies, Foundation Schools and Federations. There is no single structure which makes a school good or bad.

4.8.2 We believe that strong Governance, freedom from government micro-management and ability to innovate are crucial for all schools. We want to create a level playing field between educational institutions, which encourages them to innovate and adapt their practices to meet local challenges. All schools would therefore be granted the freedoms to innovate currently available to just a few, while ensuring that all schools are on a fair and level playing field in respect of admissions, funding, and other regulations.

4.8.3 We expect these changes to lead to greater diversity for schools in relation to: the curriculum; the length of the school day; time allocated to different subjects; education of differing ability groups; educational practices used; Saturday opening and holiday classes; teachers' pay beyond the nationally agreed minimum; and class sizes.

4.8.4 All schools would be subject to the same accountability, including Freedom of Information rules.

4.8.5 Local Authorities would be empowered to decide how to drive up educational standards in their areas. School improvement can be driven by high quality leaders in existing local authority sponsored schools, by introducing schools run by external sponsors, or by using collaborative approaches across schools. Local authorities would be expected to draw on three possible models of school improvement:

- Community Schools: Schools which have no single sponsor, but where the Governing Body is typically selected from the local community. We set out below proposals to improve the governance of these schools.
- A New Model of Sponsor Managed School - see below.
- Partnership Models of Improvement, including soft and hard federations, and twinning of high performing schools with weaker performers.

4.8.6 The ESA, through OFSTED, should hold local authorities accountable for driving up school standards, but they should not dictate to local authorities how they discharge these functions.

4.9 Sponsor Managed Schools: Replacing the Academies Model

4.9.1 Academies - set up predominantly in the most deprived communities in the country - aim to challenge low educational performance which is linked to social disadvantage.

4.9.2 Local authorities should be free to commission educational charities, parents, businesses, universities and other groups to run state funded schools in this way - where they judge that these bodies have the sufficient expertise to do so.

4.9.3 However, the Academies model is unfair in relation to freedoms granted and unsustainable given the way it is centrally run from Westminster.

4.9.4 Liberal Democrats would replace the Academies programme with a new devolved model of Sponsor Managed Schools in which:

- All schools, including existing Academies (which would become Sponsor Managed Schools), would be under the strategic oversight of local authorities and not Ministers in Whitehall.
- Local Authorities, as commissioners of local educational provision, would select sponsors on the basis of their educational expertise and not their bank balances.
- Local Authorities would be empowered to limit the time period of any sponsorship and to require re-tendering after a set period, for example, 10 years.
- All schools would enjoy the same freedoms to innovate and would be funded in a fair and consistent way.
- All schools would have the same responsibilities and financial incentives in relation to exclusions and high-needs children.
- There would be no ability to select unfairly by aptitude or ability and local authorities would oversee and approve any selection by banding to ensure that it is not used to stifle school choice and skew admissions to the detriment of pupils from deprived neighbourhoods or backgrounds. In addition, we would expect local authorities to ensure that the tests to determine banding are not engineered to select only the most committed students.
- Local Authorities could specify requirements for community use of facilities in all state funded schools.
- Capital for new buildings would be based on need, not on choice of school type.
- All schools will be public authorities for the purposes of the application of human rights laws and will be covered by Freedom of Information legislation and will be subject to judicial review.

4.9.5 There may be cases where parents groups wish to take over schools, for example, small schools which would otherwise be subject to unplanned closure in rural areas.

4.9.6 Other bodies such as educational charities might also wish to establish local schools, particularly where parents are not satisfied with the existing education on offer.

4.9.7 We are opposed to the Conservative plans to divert £4.5bn from the Building Schools for the Future programme to build new schools. This would come at the expense of existing state funded schools.

4.9.8 Where a Local Authority has established that a new school is needed, we believe that it is right that bids should be invited from all those with suitable expertise. Any such school would therefore be funded from local authority capital and owned by the local authority.

4.9.9 We believe that the Sponsor Managed Schools model should be used to encourage existing private schools back into the state sector to help improve choice for all parents. Our aspiration is that there should be a closer partnership between state and private sector, including sharing facilities and staff, rather than encouraging private schools to offer free or subsidised places to a limited number of pupils, which should not in itself determine charitable status.

4.10 Partnership Models of School Improvement

4.10.1 Local Authorities should also be free to develop models of school improvement which rely on co-operation between schools. This does not just mean 'comfortable co-existence', but real collaboration. This could include soft and hard federations, and twinning of high performing schools with weaker performers.

4.10.2 This may be particularly helpful for smaller schools in rural areas, but school partnering can have a much wider benefit. School and College Partnership would be particularly important to deliver the 14-19 curriculum choice.

4.11 School Improvement and Governance

4.11.1 At present, the Government relies upon a jumble of 14 different bodies to monitor and support schools. We need a much clearer and more streamlined process of school accountability and improvement.

4.11.2 National Government is entitled to set down its expectations for schools. Local Authorities should monitor and assess standards in all their local state funded schools.

4.11.3 Where a local school is failing to deliver, there would be a number of possible routes to secure better standards for children:

- The local authority could provide support from its own resources and advisers.
- The local authority could require an inspection by OFSTED, to be held within 60 days. OFSTED would provide its own assessment and advice.
- The local authority could direct the School Governing Body to prepare a School Recovery Plan within a set timescale.
- If this is not successful, the Local Authority could use reserve powers to remove the headteacher and/or Governing Body of a school and require federation or partnering or 'Sponsor Managed School' status.
- In the case of a failing state funded school run by a non-local authority sponsor, for example an existing Academy, the local authority would also have these powers of intervention, subject only to appeal rights to the ESA. A Local Authority could then select a new governing body and headteacher, or could invite bids for new sponsors for the school. The Local Authority would be empowered to time-limit any such period of sponsorship.
- The size of governing bodies for community schools would be determined by each school.

- Local Authorities need to be more pro-active in head-hunting and training able and committed people from their local communities to serve on governing bodies. They should also consider inviting businesses, universities and others to support community schools, including by serving as school governors, without having to take on the full responsibilities of 'Sponsor Managed School' status.

4.12 School Governing Bodies

4.12.1 School governing bodies should play a crucial role. However, too many governing bodies lack the necessary skills and drive and many are diverted by the range of responsibilities which they have. Sometimes there is also an ambiguity over who is providing the 'real' oversight, between the governing body and the Local Authority. The onerous and complicated nature of governor responsibilities makes recruitment and retention difficult.

4.12.2 The schools sector can learn from the college sector, which has many examples of good governance.

4.12.3 We would ensure that:

- The role of governing bodies is simplified and clarified. They are the first guarantor of standards. Their role should include: selecting the head teacher or principal; setting strategic goals; monitoring standards; budget oversight; serving as a court of appeal; and helping to ensure both the independence of the institution and its constructive interaction with other parts of the local educational network. They should not become bogged down in the day to day management of schools.
- Governing bodies are solely selected on the basis of the skills needed for the role, including maintaining community links.
- All governing bodies receive professional advice and clerking support.
- The effectiveness of governing bodies is regularly assessed by OFSTED, and they are always involved in inspections.
- More action is taken to raise the status of governors and attract more people to become a governor, with a campaign to encourage employers to recognize and encourage employees to take on this role.
- There is a new body established to encourage school governors' recruitment and retention on the model of the NHS Appointments Board to help identify highly engaged, highly motivated, and skilled governors who are committed to delivering real strategic oversight of their school.
- Chairs of governing bodies receive payment on a similar basis to non-executive members of NHS Trusts - to encourage quality applicants and to recognise the importance of the role.

Creating Schools and Colleges for the Future

5.0.1 The educational environment is changing rapidly and we cannot simply plan for the future on the assumption that it be very similar to the past. It is not for any political party, least of all a liberal party, to lay down one set blueprint. However, we need to explore how the educational system is likely to develop, and how we can support these changes.

5.1 Schools and Colleges for the Future

5.1.1 Too many of our schools and colleges are still using buildings which are not fit for purpose. This sends out a message to students and staff which reinforces low aspirations. At the same time, many of our institutions are designed for a different age - an age when education for many was only expected to last to age 16; when the curriculum offer was expected to be narrow and largely academic; where inclusion of children with SEN was not given priority; and where schools only delivered education and not other services.

5.1.2 Our expectations now are that almost all students would want to be in some type of education and training until 19 and that from age 14 there would be a more diversified curriculum.

5.1.3 We also note that: there is some evidence that smaller schools, or large schools broken down into smaller settings, can create a better environment for students' learning; that frequent transitions between educational establishments can be associated with set-backs in progress; and that there is considerable evidence that early years intervention, in partnership with parents, can be effective in supporting young people, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.1.4 We would:

- Maintain a well funded programme of upgrading, and, where necessary, re-building institutions across the country. Local Authorities would drive this programme.
- Ensure that all new build and re-development is designed to create zero carbon schools and colleges.
- Support viable smaller schools and the breaking down of large institutions into more manageable units.
- Facilitate changes designed to create more 'all through' schools, including merging infant and junior schools.
- Support the location of early years and parental support services on school sites.
- Encourage the federation of special and mainstream schools on one site, and in one building, under a joint governing body and principal.

5.2 Technology for the Future

5.2.1 New technology has already led to dramatic changes and further change is inevitable, and desirable. New developments would open up more opportunities for schools to:

- Deliver high quality education to more isolated communities. This could help make small schools viable and enable the wider 14-19 curriculum to be delivered.
- Increase personalised learning, tailoring teaching more closely to the needs, individual progress and preferred learning styles of pupils.
- Help schools to engage parents and give them more information on their child's performance, attendance, work plans, and behaviour.

5.2.2 We would ensure that opportunities were opened up, by enhancing interaction between teachers and the IT industry to facilitate the exchange of ideas, challenges and innovation. New technology also poses some threats where large amounts of personal data are concerned. We would scrap the expensive and ineffective ContactPoint database, which is designed to hold details of all children in England.

5.2.3 Technology has the power to transform the educational experience of pupils with SEN and those with disabilities. We would ensure that all children who require technology to assist their learning have access to such equipment.

5.3 Zero Carbon Schools and Colleges

5.3.1 The UK's schools have a major impact on the environment, accounting for around 15% of total public sector CO₂ emissions; in addition the school run currently generates 3.2 million tonnes of CO₂ each year. However, schools and colleges also form a huge block of public sector procurers and can accordingly have a major impact on the market. We would ensure they become standard-bearers for local and sustainable procurement, where possible acting through their local authority. We would encourage educational institutions to form procurement federations to reduce costs.

5.3.2 The existing Building Schools for the Future programme already incorporates targets for sustainability, but these need to be made much more ambitious. We would require all newly built education buildings, including those built with support from the programme, to be zero-carbon in their construction and operation. This means that they should be built from sustainable materials, meet high insulation standards, use sustainable heating, power and water systems and recycle as much of their materials as possible.

5.3.3 Schools and colleges could borrow money to invest in capital expenditure in energy efficiency and renewable energy schemes. This investment would be through a soft loan from government through local authorities and would be paid back through the energy saving and feed-in tariff created from the capital investment. This would on average take a repayment period between 5 to 10 years from money that would have otherwise been spent on their bills. The savings are paid back into the same fund which is then available for other bodies to borrow from.

5.3.4 We would encourage walking and cycling to school and college and explore proposals for a national 'Yellow Bus' programme.

5.4 Promoting Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour

5.4.1 We do not believe that it is for Central Government to dictate how each school should maintain a safe and disciplined environment. Many of the proposals in this paper would have a significant impact on improving the behaviour of pupils. This includes: additional funding through the pupil premium; early diagnosis of SEN and low achievement; small class sizes when it matters most; the freedom for schools to tailor their curriculum to their pupils' needs, including a more relevant post 14 curriculum; more personalised learning; reducing unnecessary testing and the resultant uninspiring teaching to the test.

5.4.2 In addition we would facilitate the spread of best practice including:

- OFSTED including judgments about the safe and disciplined school environment in their reports.
- Early intervention where a child is experiencing challenges and displaying poor behaviour or a change in their performance. This might include nurture groups or other school-based solutions to assist the child.
- Ensuring that appropriate support and assistance is available to children who are carers.

- The use of Internal Exclusion Zones as part of a strategy to ensure ill-discipline is not tolerated.
- Encouraging Local Authorities and schools to consider using evening and weekend schools as alternatives to permanent exclusion and to Pupil Referral Units. This would involve those excluded having to attend on the same physical site but after school on weekdays, and on Saturdays.
- Improving support for and the quality of PRUs, where local authorities feel these are the most appropriate setting for some children.
- Parents engaging more effectively with the school and their child's education.
- Ensuring that all victims of bullying are provided with appropriate support, including access to a member of staff trained in counselling; an anti-bullying policy for each school which takes into account all types of bullying, both in and out of school; robust oversight by governors of the implementation of anti-bullying policies.

5.4.3 Liberal Democrats are concerned to ensure that schools are able to maintain good discipline, which may under certain circumstances require the permanent exclusion of pupils. While we believe it is essential that there should be a properly independent right of appeal against exclusion, we are concerned about a small but important number of cases where decisions to exclude are overturned and pupils have to be re-admitted under difficult circumstances. We will review the existing structure of and guidance to appeal panels to ensure that the right balance can be struck between maintaining school discipline and upholding the rights of pupils and parents.

5.4.4 We would encourage all schools to consult widely with students either through school councils or otherwise.

5.5 Healthy Schools

5.5.1 Too many children take little exercise and cannot rely on healthy food in the home. However, 30% of primary schools do not have a school kitchen, and two thirds of children in secondary schools do not eat school lunch.

5.5.2 We would:

- Ensure that, as part of the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement, all children have at least 2 hours of sport each week in primary schools and 3 hours each week in secondary schools.
- Make available sufficient capital to allow every school which wants one to have its own kitchen by 2015.
- Oblige all schools to provide adequate time and seating facilities for all children to eat lunch in school.
- Ensure that proper financial support is made available to assist schools in providing higher quality school food at affordable prices, while amending the Government's new nutrient-based standards to ensure that they are realistic and achievable.
- Seek to extend the entitlement to free meals to all 16 and 17 years olds in college settings, and extend the general entitlement to Free School Meals, starting with the 500,000 children from low income working households (entitled to Working Tax Credit) who were excluded from the entitlement by the Tories in the 1980s.
- Include PHSE in the minimum curriculum entitlement.

5.6 Affordable education

5.6.1 Although education from age 5 to age 19 is free to all, there are still barriers for some families.

5.6.2 We would:

- Make the school costs requirements of the School Admissions Code enforceable in their own right and extend the powers of the Schools Adjudicator to allow parents to make direct complaints where school costs requirements are not complied with. We recognise that costs can be a problem for parents once their child is in school, as well as at the point of admission, and the new powers of the Schools Adjudicator would reflect this.
- Encourage local authorities, as the first tier of inspection, to monitor charging policies in schools and assess them in relation to equality of access to education and discrimination against disadvantaged children.
- Allow educational institutions to use the Pupil Premium to enhance the experience available to disadvantaged pupils.

5.7 Rural Schools

5.7.1 The Liberal Democrats have been critical of the Government's confused approach to rural schools. Ministers have claimed to support rural schools but have then demanded that local authorities act to reduce the number of surplus places they have. The closure of a rural school should always be the last option which is considered. Local authorities should be encouraged to consider innovative solutions such as federations and sharing facilities between rural schools.

5.7.2 Due to the unfair way in which deprivation funding is allocated, rural schools often lose out. The Pupil Premium would address this problem by attaching funding to the pupil so that rural schools taking on children from disadvantaged backgrounds would be guaranteed extra money.

5.7.3 Where rural schools have a small number of pupils on their roll they it can be a struggle to focus on those pupils who are in need of extra support. The Pupil Premium would help rural schools by delivering more cash to the frontline so that teachers have the resources to properly support all their pupils.

5.7.4 Rural areas often have less access to choice than urban areas and we would seek to mitigate the effects of this through encouraging schools and colleges to use technology to open up choice, alongside exploring the best ways to improve rural transport.

Equity and Excellence

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This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

Working Group on 5-19 Education

Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.

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