

The Future of Our Children: Jeremy Corbyn's Speech on Education Policy

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On the same day that Theresa May did a catastrophically inept interview on the Andrew Marr show (evading questions, robotic repetition of her ridiculous "strong and stable" mantra, refusing to admit that nurses relying on food banks to survive is wrong, trying to whitewash the ongoing Tory electoral fraud investigations ...) Jeremy Corbyn received a standing ovation from hundreds of head teachers for his speech about Labour's education policy.

The mainstream press will give Corbyn's speech minimal publicity, and hardly any of the scant coverage that does appear will frame the speech in terms of the rousing ovation that it received.

That's why I'm providing a transcript of the speech so you can judge it for yourself.

[Introductions] ...

It is a great honour to address you, leaders of one of the most important professions in our society, those who look after the education, the wellbeing, and the future of our children.

That is why Labour is making our children's education one of the cornerstones of our General Election campaign.

The choice in this election could not be clearer – and it's not the re-run of the EU referendum that the Prime Minister wants it to be.

Britain needs a government for the many not the few – one that's ready to invest in our economy and public services. But the Conservatives have demonstrated that cannot be them, preferring to give the richest and largest corporations tax hand-outs worth tens of billions.

The NHS and social care have been pushed into a state of emergency. Housebuilding has fallen to its lowest peacetime rate since the 1920s. Schools across the country face real terms cuts in funding per pupil, and class sizes are rising – while those young people who want to go to university face huge debts.

There is no greater responsibility than ensuring our children get the education that they deserve. I know this, you know this, parents up and down this country know this. But it is clear that this Conservative Government has its focus elsewhere.

The NAHT has correctly pointed out that this election is make or break time for our children's education system.

As all of you will know, the National Audit Office confirms that schools are facing a cut of three billion pounds in real terms by 2020, the first real terms cut in education budgets in a generation.

This is an absolutely staggering figure and shows the need for a complete change of direction in how the government of this country treats our schools.

And we have to ask ourselves: is this how we want to treat the education system of our children? Is this how Britain's children deserve to be treated?

Do our children deserve to be held back by a chronic shortage of teachers?

Do our children deserve to be crammed into schools like sardines?

Do our children deserve to be taught by teachers whose morale is at an all-time low?

Not by any fault of the teachers, they are the people who also bear the burden of government cuts, but the fault of governments who fail to recognise the importance of investing in the lives of children, and those who teach and support them, up and down this country.

That is why we must value teachers, because if we don't we lose them. And you know better than anyone there is a recruitment crisis and that crisis will be made even worse if we don't secure the rights of EU nationals.

Last year 5,000 teachers from EU countries qualified to teach here and there are thousands more working to teach our children. So that's why, as Keir Starmer set out this week, a Labour government will guarantee the rights of EU nationals living here.

And if we lose teachers, we lose subjects, we narrow the horizons of young people. So that's why I passionately believe in an Arts Pupil Premium so that every primary school child will benefit from a £160 million cash boost to help pupils learn to play instruments, learn drama and dance and have "regular access" to theatres, galleries or museums in their local areas.

And yet, while all this is happening, while funding to our children's education is cut, multinational corporations have received multi-billion pound tax giveaways

How can it be right that money is being siphoned straight out of our children's schools and directly into the pockets of the super-rich?

We have to be clear, once and for all, that enough is enough.

Throughout this General Election campaign, we will be making absolutely clear our commitment to build a country for the many, and not just the few.

A vital part of that will be creating an education system that provides for every child regardless of their background, or their parents' income.

Labour will introduce a National Education Service, ensuring excellent learning opportunities for all from early years to adult education.

What we need now – and what you as teaching professionals need now – are concrete answers and concrete solutions to the problems that our education system is facing.

That is why Labour has set out a plan to help give every young person the best start in life possible, by introducing universal free school meals for pupils at primary schools. It's a policy that is fully costed, and will be paid for by introducing VAT on private school fees.

There are clear educational benefits to providing universal free school meals. It boosts the attainment and level of education of our children. We know that these early formative years are the most important in a child's education and we have a duty to provide for our children the best we possibly can throughout that period.

It's a policy that demonstrates how a Labour government would care for the many, and not just the few.

We will ensure that every single child receives a healthy and nutritious meal which will not only boost children's productivity in the classroom but also helps to ensure their personal wellbeing, no matter what their background.

Children eating together is a great start in life.

So not only will the policy help children throughout their time in education, it will also help teachers who will see the benefits of improved concentration and improved attainment in the classroom.

And it will help parents who will not only save money but will have the peace of mind in knowing that their child is getting a healthy school meal during the day

Investing in the health of our nation's children, is investing in our nation's future.

If we are to truly place value on our children's education, we must also place value on the teachers, head teachers and other school staff who deliver that education.

We must put an end to the continual attacks on the teaching profession, end the downward pressure on pay and conditions, the constant undermining of morale and the erosion of standards that means we have more unqualified teachers than ever in our classrooms.

That's why, as part of the comprehensive programme Labour has set out today to strengthen rights at work and end the race to the bottom in the jobs market, we have confirmed a Labour government will lift the cap on public sector pay.

It cannot be right that those who provide our vital public services have their pay squeezed year after year. Britain's public service employees deserve a pay rise.

And we must give the teaching profession the recognition it deserves, not only in terms of pay, but also in terms of status in our society.

We need to listen to you, the teaching professionals, on how you believe schools can be improved and respect the huge wealth of talent and knowledge that lies in the teaching profession as a whole.

I have always believed that the people who know how to a job best are those who do it day

in day out. We must start listening to parents, teachers and head teachers: you are the people who know how schools should be run and you are the people who best understand the needs of our children.

That is why Labour has taken our lead from the NAHT – and from the other teachers' unions – when we set out in no uncertain terms our opposition to the expansion of grammar schools in this country.

Not only does the mass introduction of segregation in our education system not help the overwhelming majority of this country's children, it also returns us to what are frankly Victorian notions of education based on a narrow curriculum.

The task is clear: we must build an education system that suits the needs of our children and the opportunities they will have in the jobs market of tomorrow.

And if we are to build an economy worthy of the 21st century, we need a schools system that looks forwards, and not backwards to the failed models of the past.

We must recognise that every single child in this country has talents and every single child deserves the chance to flourish and thrive to their maximum potential in whichever field suits them best.

But our children's schools do not exist in a vacuum. I am always in awe of the local head teachers I work with. Like thousands of children, I have learned so much from them.

And what I admire most is their commitment – not just to managing their schools and to educating our children – but the multi-faceted demands of the children in their community: their housing issues, immigration problems, their mental health. You are the heart of your communities.

You are part of a wider care system and you need the other parts of that system to work effectively alongside you, youth services, the NHS and social care.

Support for schools by these services is essential to promote pupil wellbeing. The duty to directly address pupils' mental health needs ultimately rests with the social and care services.

No school should be asked to fund health and social care services from the school budget. That is why Labour has pledged to address the chronic underfunding for social care and the NHS.

As you all know schools are most effective as places of learning when they work together with high quality social care and health services to meet the needs of all students but especially those who are most vulnerable.

One in ten children and young people in this country suffer from a mental health condition and 75 percent of adult mental health problems are found to begin before the age of 18.

We must prioritise the mental wellbeing of our children. This is the least they deserve.

It is vital that we enable early intervention and provide support when problems first emerge but to do this we must build an education system that integrates social and health care.

Improving the way our society deals with mental health is a particular concern of mine because I am passionate to see opportunities for all.

That's why I have been so impressed by the work so many of you do for children with special needs and how good special needs co-ordinators can liberate children from what has sometimes been a lifetime of exclusion.

That focus on the individual child is what drives our determination to reduce class sizes. We know that half a million children have been landed in super-size classes of 31 pupils or more.

This government is failing on education on its own terms. The Prime Minister herself has said that super-sized classes are proof of a school system in crisis. So then why is it allowed to continue?

Why are our children's schools, not getting the funding that they deserve? This is a choice. And it is the wrong choice. The cut to schools funding is also a breach of their manifesto the Conservatives' pledge to protect schools funding.

Labour will ensure schools have the resources they need.

I'm afraid I can't give you a sneak preview of the full Labour manifesto today but be assured if it's a choice between a tax giveaway to the largest corporations paying the lowest rates of tax in the developed world or funding for our schools. Labour will make very different choices from the Conservatives.

We have already started to set some of that out not just our free schools meals policy.

And our commitment to reintroduce the Educational Maintenance Allowance for college students from lower incomes.

We are also committed to restoring maintenance grants for university students so that no one is held back from realising their ambitions and so that every schoolchild knows that the options of further and higher Education are available to them.

We must not be ashamed to value education, for education's own sake.

Schools should exist to get the very best from our children, to give them the best start in life, to enable them to succeed in whichever walk of life they chose.

Whereas Theresa May's government has repeatedly cut resources and staffing we will invest in our children's futures because they deserve nothing less.

The excuses from the government come thick and fast. They've blamed teachers for not working hard enough, they've diverted funds to their vanity projects. £138.5 million wasted on schools that have closed, partially closed or never opened in the first place.

We will not bring back a system that blamed children and parents for not passing the eleven plus and getting into a grammar school.

They blame everybody else, to divert attention from their own damaging failures. They need head teachers to tell them, own up, take responsibility and say sorry.

Labour will give schools the funding that our children deserve, the funding that teachers and headteachers deserve and the investment that our country and our economy deserves.

This election can be the chance for a fresh start, with a Labour government that will invest to create shared prosperity, protect our public services and build a fairer Britain.

A Labour government will work with you, we will give schools the funding the need and we will ensure you and your staff get the respect and resources you need.

We have a duty to our children and we will meet it.

Thank you.

[Standing ovation]



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