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Bringing down the barriers - NUT's five year strategy for education

Short term thinking and petty political point scoring has undermined education, the National Union of Teachers says in its statement*for education, "Bringing down the barriers", outlining a five year strategy for the development of education.

Reform of the National Curriculum, an end to selection, targets, league tables and Key Stage tests and the replacement of OFSTED with a restructured HM Inspectorate are key components of the strategy, published today (Friday 12 November).

Steve Sinnott, NUT General Secretary, said: "This is the Union's vision for the future and underlines the position of the NUT as *the* education union. Bringing down the barriers needs to be the theme of education for our new century.

"Education must be a service for all, giving every child equality of access to a curriculum that is broad and flexible to meet their individual needs. Social class and low income should not be a barrier to any child. Each should have access to those extras such as trips to museums and theatres which help broaden their understanding of the world and deepen their educational development.

"Every child should have the opportunity to benefit from personal tutoring but in school. Such extra support should not depend on whether their parents can afford it. Each child can benefit from that extra boost if the resources and time are made available to schools.

"For thousands of parents, the 'right to choose' is an illusion. In reality it is only available to a few and exacerbates social division. All the evidence points to parents wanting good local schools rather than a range of different institutions inequitably funded and promoted.

"It would be profoundly pessimistic to assume that the idea of good local schools for every community is a less powerful concept than the 'right to choose'.

"I shall be seeking a meeting with the Education Secretary and with the education spokespeople of the other political parties to discuss and promote this vision. The Union will also seek support from parent groups, governors, business, other teacher organizations and the TUC.

"As a first step, this statement will form the centerpiece of a seminar involving teachers, academics, parents' representatives and think tank members on Monday, 15 November."

'Bringing down the barriers' is based on the NUT's experience and knowledge and on evidence of national and international developments. Its proposals focus on four key areas:

- an education service for all;
- the National Curriculum and its assessment;
- the teaching profession; and
- accountability.

Achieving Equality of Access

- Local authorities should establish local education advisory forums. They should advise on the development of extended and full service schools and on a single conversation with schools. Their membership should include representatives of parents, teacher and governor organisations and be chaired by lead members of children's services. Local authorities should retain directors of education and social services.
- Initiatives for the development of extended and full service schools should come from schools themselves. Local authorities should be required to cost developments and guarantee funding, including capital funding.
- Pupil selection should be abolished. Local admissions forums would determine common admission procedures.
- Local school organisation committees would be required to consider both proposals from local authorities and from local communities for new schools. Local authorities should combine to determine where new schools should be built. Sponsors would not be able to propose new schools.
- Specialist facilities developed by individual schools should be available to schools in the wider community.
- Local authorities should be given the powers and financial capacity to provide long term support to schools which are in difficulty.
- The Government should cost the requirements it places on schools. Such cost evaluations should cover the real term costs of introducing other services at school level, including building costs.
- The Government should set up funding review groups to cost the requirements it places on schools.
- A separate group would examine the ability of local authorities to sustain across all services the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged communities.
- A halt will be called to the role of the private sector in providing essential education services at national and local level. Local authorities would combine to support those which are in difficulties.

- Local authorities would be required to retain or ensure schools have access to a range of core services, including those for minority ethnic achievement; educational psychology; tackling unacceptable pupil behaviour; and vulnerable children.
- Local authorities would be required to maintain or have access to a range of provision, including pupil referral units, hospital and home services and special schools and units, including those for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- A national grant should be established for local authorities when their schools experience significant increases in the number of children of refugees and asylum seekers.
- A funding strategy should be developed by government for creating an entitlement to high quality and affordable childcare for all working parents.
- The Government should launch a sustained programme to ensure that all schools are fully accessible.

Schools and the National Curriculum and Assessment

- The National Curriculum is over-prescribed and overloaded. An independent review should be conducted by government of the 5-14 curriculum focusing on restructuring the National Curriculum as a broad framework.
- The present distinction between the core and foundation subjects would be replaced.
- The framework would describe a range of statutory entitlements, including literacy, numeracy, science and technology, the creative arts, the humanities, including a knowledge of global developments, information and communication, technology and modern foreign languages.
- The framework would encourage new approaches to learning, such as thinking skills, environmental learning, the impact of religious and secular beliefs on society, learning about industry and manufacturing, citizenship and personal and social education, including healthy living and the importance of exercise.
- There will be specific references to the needs of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The needs of children from socially and economically deprived backgrounds alongside those with special educational needs and disabilities will be integral to the new framework.
- As part of the development of personalised learning, the Government should fund and pilot, in a group of primary and secondary schools, personal tuition

arrangements for pupils which would involve enhancing the number of teaching staff in those schools.

- There should be a guaranteed entitlement for all pupils within the pilot. Personal tuition entitlements would include a range of experiences, including involvement in a minimum number of outdoor activities and visits to museums and galleries.
- An independent review of testing and assessment of children should be commissioned by the Government. It should be modelled on the recent review of assessment conducted in Wales and cover the current foundation stage profile of testing and assessment in the 5-14 age range.
- A thorough audit of the cost implications of 14-19 reform should be conducted by government. As no single government will have responsibility for implementing the post-Tomlinson arrangements, an implementation body should be established to cover the ten year implementation time of 14-19 reforms. Teacher organisations, the TUC, Learning and Skills Councils, Universities and industry alongside the Government and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should be included in the implementation body's membership.

The Teaching Profession

- Every teacher should be entitled to guaranteed time during the timetabled teaching day for professional development.
- Each school should receive annually a minimum funding entitlement for each teacher of £1,000, at current prices, for personal professional development.
- Each teacher should be entitled to a one term sabbatical, once every seven years of teaching, to conduct his or her own research into effective classroom practice.
- The Government's national strategy for continuing professional development should be relaunched.
- The Union Learning Fund should be expanded to cover teachers' professional development programmes, including leading edge developments in teaching.
- Governments should make available through Voluntary Service Overseas and the British Council a range of opportunities for experienced teachers to work in developing countries for a year, including scholarships.
- The Government should define the core characteristics of practising teachers. Parliamentary approval should be sought for regulations which identify the work of qualified teachers alongside separate regulations identifying the work of support staff.

- Each school and pupil referral unit should be required to employ a minimum number of teachers. The basic number of teachers for each school should be defined by maximum class and group size limits.
- The next government should publish legislation which sets maximum class sizes for the 3-19 age range and which reduces further class sizes for 5-7 year olds.
- Falling roles should represent an opportunity, not a threat, and they should be used to improve class sizes, the ability of teachers to meet specific learning needs, expand the curriculum and link up with other schools and industries.
- The Government should establish a target annually for the total number of teachers and support staff to be employed. The target total should be costed in the annual Local Government Finance Settlement.
- The Government should initiate a major thorough investigation into the future supply of teachers for the next 10-15 years.

Accountability in Schools

- School performance tables and national targets should be abolished.
- In place of tables and targets, the Government should re-establish an independent Assessment of Performance Unit. It should respond to requests for national evidence on standards within schools and colleges.
- The term 'special measures' should be abolished. It should be replaced by the term 'schools in need of additional support'.
- Local authorities should be required to provide support, including advisers and seconded teachers based in such schools.
- An independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate should replace OFSTED. It should be a stand-alone independent, publicly funded body and not as now a non-ministerial government department.
- HMI would evaluate the procedures put in place by schools to assess their strengths and weaknesses and their plans for improvement. HMI would be accompanied by a small number of trained advisers drawn from teachers, advisers, parents and school communities who would advise HMIs. Each school would be able to appoint a 'critical friend' whose job it would be to provide advice to the headteacher and staff and secure additional support where necessary. The school would make the appointment. Specific grants allocated by government would fund critical friend posts.

- HMI evaluations could cover both individual schools and collaborative arrangements involving a number of schools.
- There should be an open and separate appeals procedure for schools which disagree with HMI evaluations. The results of appeals could lead to judgements being maintained, modified or overturned.

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For further information contact: Olive Forsythe tel: 0207 380 4706 (office) 020 8313 1692 (weekday evenings) or if all else fails, 07879 480061.