

Prime Minister's speech on Government five year plan for education

Commenting on the Prime Minister, Tony Blair's speech today (Wednesday 7 July) Steve Sinnott, NUT General Secretary, said:

“The NUT welcomes the Prime Minister's assertion that there will be no selection, but he needs to make sure that he is going the right way to achieve it.

“We face a divisive and confusing array of academies, foundation schools, specialist schools, faith schools and community schools. What parents need and teachers want to provide is an education that fits the needs of their children for the future. Instead they are being offered confusion.

“Only some parents have the luxury of being able to transport their children across a city or a rural county. Only some parents can fight their way through an admissions system that allows individual schools to set their own criteria. That is not choice: that is a test of parents' ability to fight their way through a morass of admissions schemes and is a recipe for selection by schools.

“Choice will only work when every school is funded to meet the needs of its pupils. It is not possible against a background of differential funding and preferential treatment for some schools over others.

“The Prime Minister's 'freedom' will deprive schools of the support and advice available from local authorities and which they value. That same 'freedom' was a Conservative Government policy that backfired. Few schools wanted it and those who opted out of local authorities soon found they needed those services reproduced creating waste and duplication. The Government should not be looking back to failed policies.

“Its proposal that schools should have three-year budgets is welcome. It will allow them to plan ahead and develop provision against known financial stability.

“So-called good schools being given freedom to raise money will not build extra classrooms one minute faster. But it will place a huge responsibility on heads for finance and oversight of the project without support from their local authority. Headteachers are neither buildings project managers nor financial whiz kids.