



The parties' schools policy commitments 2015

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Although the parties have not yet published their election manifestos setting out their priorities on education, all have made a number of public statements and commitments regarding schools policy.

This note lists public commitments made by the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green Party made in selected speeches, documents and publications. It also includes references to Standard Notes produced by the House of Commons Library that provide further information on the areas covered by the policy commitments.

The note only includes the commitments made in the sources referred to and does not offer a comprehensive list of all commitments made by each party. It also should not be taken as providing a list of the parties' policy priorities; these will become clear once the parties publish their manifestos. The note also does not provide assessment or analysis of the policy commitments.

As education is a devolved policy matter in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the note only considers policy commitments in relation to England from the parties listed above.

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1 Introduction

A clearer indication of the proposed education priorities in the next parliament will be provided when the parties publish their election manifestos, which they are expected to do following the dissolution of parliament on 30 March 2015.

Although the manifestos have not yet been published, the parties have made a number of public commitments and statements regarding their intended schools policies. A selection of these for each party is provided below. The lists only include the commitments made in the sources referred to and do not offer a comprehensive list of all commitments made by each party. The lists should also not be taken as the policy priorities of the parties; these will become clear once the parties publish their manifestos.

2 Conservative Party

In a [speech at a school in Enfield](#) on 2 February 2015, David Cameron spoke about some of the Conservative Party's election priorities on schools. Further commitments were outlined by the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, in an article for the Sunday Times and in a [speech by the Prime Minister in Isleworth](#) on 9 March 2015. The commitments include:

School funding – ‘flat cash’ per-pupil

In his speech on 2 February 2015, the Prime Minister stated that a Conservative Government would protect the cash per-pupil funding for schools:

I can tell you with a Conservative Government, the amount of money following your child into the school will not be cut. In Treasury speak, flat cash per pupil.¹

New tests for primary school pupils

In her article in the Sunday Times on 1 February 2015, Nicky Morgan stated that all 11-year-olds should know their times tables off by heart. She also stated that under a Conservative Government pupils would have to pass new tests in long division and complex multiplication, be able to read a novel and pass a writing test.² Referring to this commitment in his Enfield speech, David Cameron said:

...as Nicky announced yesterday, we are going to take action on illiteracy and innumeracy. That means putting our best teachers at the helm of the primary schools that fall short...making sure all 11 year olds take rigorous tests in maths; reading; and yes – spelling, punctuation and grammar...and setting higher standards so that – at the very least – 85 per cent of a school's pupils reach a good level of attainment, or are on their way to getting there.³

Converting schools “requiring improvement” into academies

In his Enfield speech the Prime Minister announced plans under which schools rated by Ofsted as “requiring improvement” could be converted to academies:

¹ [“David Cameron – A Britain that gives every child the best start in life”](#), Conservative Party website, 2 February 2015.

² [“All children must learn times tables”](#), Sunday Times, 1 February 2015 [log-in required]

³ [“David Cameron – A Britain that gives every child the best start in life”](#), Conservative Party website, 2 February 2015.

Under a Conservative Government, any school that Ofsted says “requires improvement” and cannot demonstrate that it has the capacity to improve will have to become a sponsored Academy.⁴

Expansion of the Free Schools programme

In his Isleworth speech David Cameron stated that a Conservative Government would hope to open 500 free schools over the course of the next parliament:

If you vote Conservative, you will see the continuation of the Free Schools programme at the rate you’ve seen in the last 3 years.

That means, over the next Parliament, we hope to open at least 500 new Free Schools...resulting in 270,000 new school places.⁵

Establishment of a National Teaching Service

The Conservative Party have outlined plans for a centrally funded National Teaching Service made up of strong teachers who would be sent to work in poorly performing schools.⁶ In an article in the Daily Mail on 12 October 2014 David Cameron wrote:

A National Teaching Fellowship will pay the best of the best to work in failing or inadequate schools.

I want to see 1,500 of these top teachers signed up and in post by 2020. That means two in every school; every child within reach of first-class teaching.⁷

Wider remit for Regional School Commissioners

In his Daily Mail article on 12 October 2014 the Prime Minister stated that a Conservative Government would extend the powers of the Regional School Commissioners:

Currently there are eight regional school commissioners overseeing all Free Schools and Academies. We will give these experts, who include former teachers, a wider remit: unprecedented powers to overhaul failing schools.

If it’s the leadership that’s not working, they can make them remove it – reappointing the whole governing body if they have to. If the curriculum isn’t up to scratch, they can change it.⁸

3 Labour Party

Some of the policy proposals of a future Labour Government were outlined by Ed Miliband in a [speech at Haverstock School](#) on 12 February 2015. Further information on the Labour Party’s schools policies is included in its [Changing Britain Together](#) and its [policy review document](#). The commitments include:

Protecting the education budget in real terms

In his Haverstock School speech Ed Miliband stated:

I can announce that the next Labour government will ensure that spending on our schools rises by as at least as much as inflation. In other words, it will be protected in real terms.⁹

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ “David Cameron speech on free schools”, Conservative party website, 9 March 2015.

⁶ “Cameron plans rescue squad of 1,500 top teachers”, Schools Week, 17 October 2014.

⁷ “I want a brilliant education for all and I want it fast, writes David Cameron”, Daily Mail, 12 October 2014.

⁸ *ibid*

He went on to state that this would also include early years education and further education, meaning that the “overall education budget” would be “protected in real terms”.¹⁰

Introducing new Directors of School Standards

Ed Miliband stated in his speech on 12 February 2015 that a Labour Government would create new Directors of School Standards who would have a remit to drive up standards in every type of school:

But we also want every school to be locally accountable and to work together to drive up standards.

And that is what our new Directors of School Standards will ensure.

And they will have a specific mission to drive up standards in every type of local school: local authority-run, academies and Free Schools.¹¹

Ending the free schools programme

The Labour Party's, *Changing Britain Together* states that a Labour Government would “end the free schools programme and instead prioritise new schools in areas where there are shortages of school places”.¹²

All teachers working towards qualified teacher status

In his speech at Haverstock School Ed Miliband stated that a Labour Government would require:

...that all teachers work towards qualified teacher status. We will support teachers to learn new skills and develop their talent. We will create a new status of Master Teacher to which they can aspire.¹³

Allow Ofsted to inspect academy chains

In a speech in August 2014, Tristram Hunt, stated that Labour's policies would include “Ofsted inspection of academy chains”.¹⁴

Introducing a new Technical Baccalaureate

The Labour Party's policy review document, *One Nation Society*, outlines the party's plans for a new Technical Baccalaureate:

Labour will also introduce a new gold-standard Technical Baccalaureate for young people to achieve at 18. This will include a work experience placement and a high standard vocational qualification accredited by employers. The Tech Bacc will give young people pursuing a vocational route something prestigious to aim for and act as a stepping stone into an apprenticeship, further study or skilled work at 18.¹⁵

⁹ “[Speech by Ed Miliband on education at Haverstock School](#)”, Labour Party website, 12 February 2015

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Labour Party, *Changing Britain Together*, p40-1

¹³ “[Speech by Ed Miliband on education at Haverstock School](#)”, Labour Party website, 12 February 2015

¹⁴ “[The Choice in Education - 70 Years of the Butler Settlement – Speech by Tristram Hunt MP](#)”, Labour Party website, 18 August 2014.

¹⁵ Labour Party, *One Nation Society*, p26

Capping class sizes

In his 12 February speech Ed Miliband said that a Labour Government would “cap class sizes for 5, 6, and 7 year olds at no more than 30 pupils”.¹⁶ Currently, classes can exceed this limit if they contain children falling into a prescribed “excepted pupil” category.

Giving headteachers greater powers

In his speech at Haverstock School the Labour Party Leader stated he wanted “all head teachers to have the powers currently given to academy heads”.¹⁷ A Library note, [Free Schools and Academies – frequently asked questions](#), gives further information on the current powers headteachers of academies.

Allowing schools to leave academy chains

In a speech to the Association of School and College Leaders on 20 March 2015, Tristram Hunt, the Shadow Education Secretary, outlined Labour proposals for a mechanism by which schools could leave academy chains:

So I would like to see shorter contracts with clearly defined break-out clauses. A sort of ‘Bosman Ruling’ for chains, where good schools could leave for a better chain more willing to serve the best interests of parents and pupils. And releases outstanding school leaders to pursue innovation and improvement with the best available partners. I see too many schools struggling with second-rate academy chains, and I want to set them free.¹⁸

School Leadership Institute

A press release from the Labour Party ahead of a speech by Tristram Hunt in February 2015 outlined plans for a new School Leadership Institute “to champion high quality leadership, attract the next generation of head teachers, and increase the numbers of black and ethnic minority (BAME) head teachers”.¹⁹

4 Liberal Democrats

In August 2014 the Liberal Democrats published a [pre-manifesto](#), which included a section on education. This was endorsed at the party’s Autumn Conference in 2014 “as the basis for constructing the party’s manifesto for the next general election”.²⁰ Its commitments include:

Protecting the education budget in real terms

The pre-manifesto document states that the Liberal Democrats would:

Protect the education budget in real terms right through from the early years to age 19 – from cradle to college. We will at least protect the schools’ Pupil Premium in real terms, consider carefully the case for any extension of the Premium, and introduce a fair national funding formula.²¹

Extending free school meals

The Liberal Democrat’s pre-manifesto includes a commitment to:

¹⁶ [“Speech by Ed Miliband on education at Haverstock School”](#), Labour Party website, 12 February 2015

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ [Speech by Tristram Hunt to the Association of School and College Leader’s Annual Conference, 20 March 2015](#)

¹⁹ [“Labour’s plan for the next generation of school leaders”](#), Labour Party website, 23 February 2015.

²⁰ [“F30: A Stronger Economy and a Fairer Society”](#), Liberal Democrats website, last accessed 19 March 2015.

²¹ Liberal Democrats, [Pre-Manifesto 2014: A Stronger Economy and a Fairer Society](#), p42

Extend free school meals to all children in primary education, as resources allow and after a full evaluation of free meals for infants, while ensuring that school food standards apply to all schools, including academies.²²

Currently children in the first three years of primary education are entitled to free school lunches, as are those from families in receipt of some benefits.

All teachers work towards qualified teacher status

Under a “parent’s guarantee” outlined in the pre-manifesto:

...all teachers in state funded schools will be fully qualified or working towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Free schools and academies will not be allowed to employ unqualified teachers from September 2016.²³

Introduction of a minimum curriculum entitlement

The pre-manifesto states that a Liberal Democrat Government would introduce a slimmed-down national curriculum that would be taught in all schools. It states that the Liberal Democrats would:

Introduce a minimum curriculum entitlement – a slimmed-down core national curriculum, which will be taught in all state-funded schools. This will include a ‘curriculum for life’ including financial literacy, citizenship and age-appropriate sex and relationship education.²⁴

Currently, only maintained schools, and not academies and free schools, are required to deliver the national curriculum.

Establishment of an Educational Standards Authority

The Liberal Democrat’s pre-manifesto document includes a commitment to:

Establish an independent Educational Standards Authority (ESA) entirely removed from ministerial interference. The ESA will be charged with responsibility for curriculum content and examination standards.²⁵

National Leadership Institute for head teachers

In a question and answer session on the Guardian website, David Laws stated that the Liberal Democrats would establish a National Leadership Institute “to increase the number of top-quality headteachers”.²⁶

Allow Ofsted to inspect academy chains

The party’s pre-manifesto states that a Liberal Democrat Government would “Allow OFSTED to inspect both local authorities and academy chains”.²⁷

5 UK Independence Party (UKIP)

On 26 September 2014, Paul Nuttall, Deputy Leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), published an [outline of UKIP’s education policies on the party’s website](#). In addition, a page

²² *ibid*, p42

²³ *ibid*, p42

²⁴ *ibid*, p43

²⁵ *ibid*, p43

²⁶ “The Lib Dems’ education policies: you ask the questions”, *Guardian*, 3 March 2015

²⁷ Liberal Democrats, *Pre-Manifesto 2014: A Stronger Economy and a Fairer Society*, p42

on the UKIP website contains a [list of the policies that a UKIP Government would follow](#). The policies include:

Increasing the number of grammar schools

Paul Nuttall's "A Better Education System for a Better Britain" states that UKIP support "a grammar school in every town".²⁸ The party's website further states:

Existing schools will be allowed to apply to become grammar schools and select according to ability and aptitude. Selection ages will be flexible and determined by the school in consultation with the local authority.²⁹

Introducing an Apprenticeship Qualification option

The "What a UKIP Government will do" page on the party's website states that UKIP would introduce a new Apprenticeship Qualification option for secondary school pupils:

UKIP will introduce an option for students to take an Apprenticeship Qualification instead of four non-core GCSEs which can be continued at A-Level. Students can take up apprenticeships in jobs with certified professionals qualified to grade the progress of the student.³⁰

Ofsted Inspections

The party's website states that a UKIP Government would allow for Ofsted to inspect schools "on the presentation of a petition to the Department for Education signed by 25% of parents or governors".³¹

Move to one exam board

Paul Nuttall's, 'A Better Education System for a Better Britain' states that UKIP would:

...ensure that there is only ONE exam board for GCSEs and ONE for A Levels offering ONE course for the relevant subject.³²

Free Schools

UKIP's website states that the party "supports the principle of Free Schools that are open to the whole community and uphold British values."³³

A more traditional primary education

The, 'A Better Education System for a Better Britain' page on the UKIP website states that the party believes in "a return to a more traditional primary education, with 'the three 'Rs'".³⁴

Sex and relationship education

The UKIP website states that the party would "scrap sex and relationship education for children under the age of 11."³⁵

²⁸ "Paul Nuttall: 'A Better Education System for a Better Britain'", UKIP website, 26 September 2014.

²⁹ "What a UKIP Government will do", UKIP website, last accessed 19 March 2015.

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *ibid*

³² "Paul Nuttall: 'A Better Education System for a Better Britain'", UKIP website, 26 September 2014.

³³ "What a UKIP Government will do", UKIP website, last accessed 19 March 2015.

³⁴ "Paul Nuttall: 'A Better Education System for a Better Britain'", UKIP website, 26 September 2014.

³⁵ *ibid*

6 Green Party

The Green Party's, *Policies for a Sustainable Society* reflects the party's current priorities and is agreed and amended at the party's conferences. The policies included in the education section of *Policies for a Sustainable Society* include:

Integrating academies and grammar schools into the Local Authority school system

Policies for a sustainable society states that the Green Party would integrate academies and free schools into the Local Authority school system.³⁶ Regarding grammar schools the policy document states that the party would:

...allow no new grammar schools and gradually integrate grammar and secondary modern schools into the comprehensive system.³⁷

All teachers to have qualified teacher status

The party's education policy document states that under a Green Government, "All teachers in state funded education will be employed through Local Authorities and have QTS (Qualified Teacher Status)."³⁸

Raising compulsory school age

The Green Party would raise the compulsory school age to 7. Its policy document states:

It will continue to be compulsory for all young people to be educated between the years of 7-16. From the age of 14 this may be provided through a variety of contexts including through skills and practical training, vocational placements and at Youth Schools.³⁹

Replacing the National Curriculum

Policies for a Sustainable Society states that:

...the National School Curriculum will be replaced with a set of learning entitlements (listed below), in the context of which learners and teachers together will develop curriculum content to suit their needs and interests.⁴⁰

Replacing OFSTED with an independent National Council of Educational Excellence

The party's policy document states a Green Government would:

...instate a system of local accountability using continuous, collaborative assessment of schools. We would replace OFSTED with an independent National Council of Educational Excellence which would have regional officers tasked to work closely with Local Authorities. The National Council would be closely affiliated with the National Federation for Educational Research (NFER).⁴¹

³⁶ Green Party, *Education: Part of the Green Party Policies for a Sustainable Society*, last updated March 2014, para ED014

³⁷ *ibid*, para ED141

³⁸ *ibid*, para ED014

³⁹ *ibid*, para ED031

⁴⁰ *ibid*, para ED041

⁴¹ *ibid*, para ED056

Class and school sizes

Policies for a Sustainable Society states that the party would in the long run “work towards class sizes of 20 at both secondary and primary level” and would work towards secondary schools having a maximum size of 700 pupils.⁴²

Free school meals

The party’s policy document states that the party would introduce a minimum requirement that:

...all children are provided free of charge with a balanced nutritious lunch including local and organic non-GM food, free from additives.⁴³

7 Further information

Below are links to House of Commons Library Standard Notes that provide further information on some of the policy areas relevant to the commitments outlined above.

School types

SN7059, [Free schools and academies - frequently asked questions](#).

SN6233, [Converter Academies: Statistics](#)

SN7033, [Free school statistics](#)

SN7070, [Grammar Schools](#)

SN1398, [Grammar school statistics](#)

Class sizes

SN2625, [Schools and class sizes: Social Indicators page](#)

The National Curriculum

SN6798, [National Curriculum review](#)

School funding

SN6702, [School funding: moving towards a national funding formula](#)

SN6701, [School funding: annual settlements under the Coalition Government](#)

SN1078, [Education Spending in the UK](#).

Teachers

SN2626, [Teachers: Social Indicators page](#)

SN6710, [Initial teacher training in England](#)

School meals

SN4195, [School meals and nutritional standards](#)

Sex and relationship education

SN6103, [Sex and Relationship Education in Schools](#)

⁴² *ibid*, para ED100

⁴³ *Ibid*, para ED190

School inspection

SN7091, *Ofsted inspections of maintained and academy schools*