

## Policy watch

Where do the major Parties stand on the key education issues?



The leaders may have spent much of the week grooming and preparing themselves for the TV debates but equally important this week has been the release of the Party Manifestos. In well orchestrated manoeuvres, each of the major Parties has repaired to a carefully selected vantage point in the country to unleash its pitch to the electorate. Labour chose a brand new hospital in middle Britain, the Conservatives went for Battersea Power Station, "*fire up the power station, it's time for a change,*" while the Lib-Dems headed down to Canary Wharf.

In each case, there's been as much interest in the covers of the Manifestos as in the details within. The reasons for this are various. Firstly, most of the announcements have been well rehearsed and well presented for some time, few come as a surprise hence the undue interest in the nuance rather than the narrative. Secondly, for many people, there's still a bitter aftertaste after the expenses scandal. As Tony Blair's renowned pollster Lord Gould put it, "*the real division is no longer between Labour and the Conservatives, it's between politics and anti-politics.*" And thirdly, economic circumstances being what they are, there's no money for big new initiatives. As the Guardian noted, "*five years on and one banking crisis later, the tone is decidedly different.*" What we have therefore is the rhetoric of the reasoned rather than the radical.

The big three Manifestos certainly offer us plenty of detail, 300 pages worth if you lay them end to end but would the '*the Great Ignored,*' as David Cameron called the voters he was targeting, now feel less ignored? Here's a policy check on some of the key education issues of the day and what the Parties have said in each case.

### Primary school reforms

**Labour:** Implement the 'Rose' reforms, guarantee specialist support in the 3Rs including specialist maths teachers, all primary schools to teach a foreign language, guarantee childcare and extended activities programmes

**Conservative:** Revamp the primary curriculum around subject disciplines, promote synthetic phonics, establish a '*simple*' reading test at age six, extend the Academy programme to primary schools

**Lib-Dem:** Introduce a Pupil Premium to enable more one-to-one support and smaller classes

### National Curriculum testing

**Labour:** No specific mention beyond introduction of the School Report Card

**Conservative:** Will keep Key Stage 2 tests but make them '*more rigorous*'

**Lib-Dem:** Scale back the tests, use teacher assessment with external checking

### The Secondary School Curriculum

**Labour:** Encourage single sciences, MFL and Diplomas, strengthen vocational learning, review the qualification system in 2013

**Conservative:** Reform the National Curriculum around knowledge mastery, allow state schools to offer '*high quality international exams,*' develop '*proper technical and vocational education*'

**Lib-Dem:** Introduce a slimmed down Minimum Curriculum Entitlement

## Standards

**Labour:** Introduce pupil and parent guarantees and School Report Cards, rely on the new independent 'exam' regulator

**Conservative:** Reform league tables, make the curriculum more challenging, establish a free online database of past papers and exam schemes, concentrate inspection on teaching and learning

**Lib-Dem:** Replace QCDA and Ofqual with '*a fully independent Educational Standards Authority,*' reform league tables, allow schools to innovate

## School Structures

**Labour:** Devolve more power to school leaders, enable parents to ballot for changed school leadership, introduce '*a new generation of not-for-profit chains of schools,*' pioneer University Technical Colleges, grow Academy programme

**Conservative:** Encourage all existing schools to gain Academy status and grant them clear freedoms, enable new providers, including parents, to set up new Academy type schools, establish Technical Academies

**Lib-Dem:** Replace Academies with more locally accountable '*Sponsor Managed Schools,*' grant Local Authorities clear strategic responsibility for schools

## Young People

**Labour:** Provide guaranteed places on an apprenticeship, training or study up to age 18, establish a raised 'leaving' age, retain education Maintenance Allowances

**Conservative:** Create 20,000 additional young apprenticeships, allow schools and colleges '*to offer workplace training*'

**Lib-Dem:** Scrap the compulsion in raising the 'leaving' age, give young people the right to opt for a college rather than school course

## FE and skills

**Labour:** Create 70,000 advanced apprenticeships a year, free up colleges, develop a traffic-light grading system for courses and colleges, develop a new technician class especially in key economic sectors

**Conservative:** Create 400,000 work-based places over two years, create an FEFC, remove '*many quangos,*' free up colleges, establish a Community Learning Fund

**Lib-Dem:** Close the funding gap between schools and FE, direct Train to Gain funding at small firm training and Level 3 provision, replace quangos

## HE

**Labour:** Continue to open up access, give priority to more diverse forms of provision and key economic sectors, develop clearer course information

**Conservative:** Provide an extra 10,000 university places this year, delay the implementation of the Research Excellence Framework, review fees scenario

**Lib-Dem:** Scrap tuition fees over time, create a National Bursary Scheme, provide for more Foundation Degree and voc courses, create a new FE/HE Funding Agency

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