

## Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



### Highlights of week ending Friday 10 April 2015

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly additional service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days and introduced to keep a special 'eye' on developments in the build up to the 2015 election.)

#### The week summed up

The week the election campaign moved up a gear with some important policy announcements including a number on education.

On Wednesday, the Conservatives announced that 11 year olds who hadn't reached a level 4 in their Key Stage 2 English and maths SATs would have to retake them in the first year of secondary or as Nicky Morgan described it, they would be 'resitted.' The announcement, which was trailed a month or so ago by the Education Secretary, has perhaps predictably not been universally acclaimed: "Eat, sleep, test, repeat," tweeted one critic pretty much capturing the mood of many. The government's argument is that KS2 tends to be a platform if not a predictor for KS4, 'only 7% of the 100,000 pupils who fail to reach level 4 at age 11 go on to secure the five good GCSEs including English and maths that are so important' but for those concerned about the perils of a test-driven culture and its impact on children, the proposal adds a further concern. As for parents, the story here is that the Conservatives are considering encouraging schools to run maths classes for parents so that they can help with the homework. Ed Balls is perhaps one parent who wouldn't need it. He was faced with the now obligatory maths challenge while out on the road this week, in this case: what's 6 x 7; he got the answer right.

A day after the Conservatives made their KS2 announcement, Labour went the whole hog and launched its education manifesto. Its theme, very much Labour's theme tune at present, was that things could be better and as if to emphasise the point, the manifesto listed 24 things a Labour government would do to make things better in areas like school standards, vocational learning, careers guidance and a fully qualified profession. The proposals, many of which build on the Party's independent Task Force Report which was chaired by Professor Chris Husbands and reported just over a year ago, have been cautiously welcomed by the profession, with the promised funding for a face-to-face careers guidance system particularly popular. The emphasis is very much on preparing young people for a changing world, perhaps a deliberate attempt to distance things from the recent bout of qualification-driven reform and suggest that the Party is keen to tackle what has long been regarded as the Achilles heel of the English education system, namely vocational education and training.

A week which started with a Guardian editorial suggesting that schools so far 'have ranked only as a second order issue' in this election has ended with schools higher up the order. It shows how much things can change in a week.

#### Top headlines this week

- 'Schools aren't getting enough attention in the 2015 general election.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Failing pupils will be ordered to take extra tests, says Cameron.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Labour pledges face-to-face careers advice in schools.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Hundreds of schools face new compulsory tests.' (**Friday**)

## People/organisations in the news this week

- The Conservatives who announced that as part of their education plans they would require pupils who didn't reach level 4 in their SATs in Year 6 to resit them in Year 7
- The Labour Party who launched their education manifesto with a focus on school standards, vocational learning and carers guidance
- The Australian government who has agreed to fund research into a potential new quality framework for international higher education agents many of whom operate without external regulation
- Professor Charles Crook of Nottingham University who tackled the issue of whether university lectures should be automatically recorded and concluded that while it could overegg performance at the expense of student attendance, it should remain an option
- The CBI whose latest economic-activity survey reported good growth in many sectors in the first quarter of this year and business optimism remaining high
- The RSA's Matthew Taylor who wrote a blog about the three dimensions of efficacy and how they help generate creative tension
- Bath, Loughborough and Sheffield who came first, second and third respectively in the latest Times Higher student satisfaction survey. The universities of Surrey and Newcastle moved into the top ten for the first time
- Guardian columnist Fiona Millar who looked into some of the manifestos coming from different parts of the education world and found the issue of school inspections emerging as one of the dominant themes
- 80 former and current school leaders who penned a letter to the Daily Mail calling on Labour to stick with current academy freedoms
- Independent fact checkers fullfactorg, who looked at the issue of qualified v unqualified teachers and concluded that while there was no clear evidence to prove qualified teachers were any better or worse than unqualified ones, subjects such as combined science, music and biology had more qualified teachers and subjects like citizenship, engineering and media studies had more unqualified teachers (based on the number of teachers with relevant subject degrees)
- The Read On, Get On campaign which called on politicians to support and invest in a new strategy that would improve the teaching of reading especially for disadvantaged and older primary school children
- The National Union of Teachers (NUT) who warned that strike action could be on the cards later this year if the autumn spending review leaves schools facing more cuts
- Next Friday, the closing date for applications from secondary schools seeking to host the novel Head of Wellbeing scheme, funded by Nuffield Health and due to be piloted from Sept

## Tweet(s) of the week

- *"The Conservatives are the union for parents-fighting to ensure more discipline, more rigour and zero-tolerance of mediocrity."* @David\_Cameron
- *"Miliband: our task is to give our children the best chance to succeed; that's what the Labour education manifesto is all about."* @ed\_ontap
- *"We need our Stephen Hawkings but also Bob the Builder, teachers say."* @ed\_ontap

- "SATs have reached SATuration point." @MichaelRosenYes
- "Since 2000, invented iphone, Mars rover and mapped human genome but couldn't provide promised primary education." @seanjcoughlan

### Acronym(s) of the Week

- EFA. Education for All, the global education movement launched 25 years ago by UNESCO, UNICEF and others to help provide quality basic education for children, young people and adults and where a new set of pledges are due to be agreed at next month's World Education Forum.

### Quote(s) of the week

- "Funding will be a challenge. So will improving results. This is a system in a state of flux." The Guardian editorial considers how the school system is looking at the start of the general election campaign
- "The cold truth is that there is no magic wand we can wave to take away the double squeeze of public finance and demographic pressure." Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt on facing reality
- "Trusting teachers is at the heart of our school reforms." Education Secretary Nicky Morgan on the Party's education pitch
- "The biggest challenge Britain faces is preparing our young people today for the economy of tomorrow." Ed Miliband introduces Labour's education plans
- "The NUT does not think that most teachers can work to full efficiency to age 68 and beyond." The NUT calls for an independent review of the retirement age for teachers

### Number(s) of the week

- 9% or 40%. Two figures used this week to claim how many teachers leave in their first year. As Sam Freedman (Director of Research at Teach First) explained in his blog, the first figure is the accurate one, the second figure includes those who trained but never started
- £50m. How much Labour is pledging to put in to support its new careers guidance service for young people
- 100,000. The number of 11 year olds who, according to official figures fail to reach a required level 4 in their English and maths Key Stage 2 SATs
- 58m. The number of children across the world who don't have access to primary school education according to the latest update on its global education targets from UNESCO

### What to look out for next week

- Labour manifesto published (Monday)
- Demos workshops on defining character education (Monday onwards)
- Conservative manifesto published (Tuesday)
- UKIP manifesto published (Wednesday)
- TV debate with five Opposition Leaders (Thursday)