

## GENERAL ELECTION 2019 MANIFESTO

Our manifesto focuses on education policy in England as education is a devolved matter. However, as an association which represents members not only in England, but also in Wales, Northern Ireland, and in Scotland through our proud association with School Leaders Scotland, we remind Westminster politicians of the importance of sufficient funding for all our home nations. The allocation for education in England is reflected UK-wide through the mechanism of the Barnett formula.

### THE SYSTEM

01

#### **Make the discourse about education more positive**

Our education system in the UK is highly regarded by other countries. We must stop talking ourselves down. Education has been used as a political football for far too long, with one side denigrating the system in an attempt to disparage the record of the other side. Robust debate is a sign of a healthy and functioning democracy, but we must beware that it does not become excessively negative. We call upon politicians of all persuasions to mind their language in the General Election campaign and, in particular, not to indulge in the corrosive practice of extolling one type of school over another type of school.

02

#### **Make education funding sustainable**

Government announcements on extra funding are welcome but they do not go far enough. The education cuts must be reversed in full, and school and college funding made sustainable for the future by the introduction of a mechanism which ensures that the education budget increases on an annual basis at least in line with actual school and college costs. The absolute and immediate priority must be to ensure there is sufficient funding to provide the support required by children and young people with special educational needs.

03

#### **Make it easier to recruit and retain teachers**

Redouble efforts to make teaching an attractive profession, including by tackling the excessive focus on punitive accountability. Improve pay not only for newly qualified teachers but across teaching in order to aid retention. Focus in particular on how we can improve teacher supply in the schools which face the greatest challenges and which often teach the most vulnerable children in the most deprived communities. Use policy to anchor equalities training and good practice into the system to encourage more diversity in the teacher and leader workforce.

04

#### **Make school and college accountability more effective**

The way we hold schools and colleges to account must be reformed in the public interest. Instead of pitching schools against one another in school performance tables we must use the system to encourage collaboration and better recognise excellence in supporting vulnerable learners. Ofsted should consider alternatives to its blunt, single-word description of a school's performance as 'inadequate'. And, as a matter of urgency, the government should no longer insist that the default solution to a school being rated 'inadequate' is for it to be taken over by another provider. Instead, support should be tailored to the individual needs of the school with the support of staff and parents.

05

#### **Make collaboration the priority in an evolving system**

Politicians must stop obsessing about one type of school versus another type of school. They must resist the urge to embark on yet more costly and distracting structural reform. And they must instead focus on encouraging collaboration. We need to focus on how we can make it easier for schools of all types to work together in groups so they are better able to share effective practice, resources and professional development. We also urge politicians to work with schools and colleges to develop and implement policy. Our system should be one of 'done with' not 'done to'.

### QUALIFICATIONS AND CURRICULUM

06

#### **Make our exam system fairer**

We cannot continue to accept that one-third of pupils must 'fail' in order that two-thirds succeed. Every year roughly this proportion falls short of achieving at least a Grade 4 standard pass in GCSE English and maths, not by accident but because it is baked into the exam system by the mechanism used to distribute grades. ASCL's Commission of Inquiry into the Forgotten Third has recommended a solution – a 'Passport in English', and in time maths, taken by pupils at the point of readiness between the ages of 15 and 19. This should be adopted.

07

#### **Make tests for 11-year-olds fairer**

National tests at the end of primary school are vital in ensuring that we are able to see how children are doing. But the current SATs system is not working and needs to be reformed. It cannot be right that we define the 'expected standard' in a way which means around one-third of 11-year-olds are currently told they have failed to reach this standard. Nor can it be right that one week of tests in seven years of schooling are used as the main basis for school performance tables. The system must be reformed so it is fairer on children and fairer on schools.

08

#### **Make GCSEs less punishing**

We must ratchet down the pressure on pupils. There are complex reasons for the rising tide of stress and anxiety but it is abundantly clear that the decision to make GCSEs deliberately more difficult is a factor and this is particularly so with vulnerable students. It must be possible to make these vital qualifications less of an ordeal without sacrificing an appropriate level of rigour. These aims are not mutually exclusive but the vital ingredients of a proportionate system. And in post-16 education we must not make the mistake of scrapping applied general qualifications. These qualifications provide a tried and tested pathway for thousands of young people. Forcing them into a binary choice between A levels and the new T levels is not in their best interests.

09

#### **Make teaching about same-sex relationships mandatory in all schools, including primary schools**

Schools are right to promote an inclusive society which includes recognition of families with same-sex parents. It should be clear that this is a government requirement and it should not be left up to schools to have to defend their decision to protesters on an individual basis. The guidance for Relationships and Sex Education should be revised accordingly.

10

#### **Make the curriculum fit for the 21st century**

We must look at what the world will be like in 10, 20, and 30 years' time and what curriculum will best serve the needs of our students, employers and nation. We must ensure our students have the right knowledge and skills for an era of great change and great challenge in order to harness the benefits of a technological revolution rather than be its casualties. We must focus both on providing the broad academic foundation to which all young people are entitled, and on developing much stronger technical and vocational pathways as students mature and begin to specialise. And we must ensure that the curriculum also promotes the well-being of our students and equips them with the resilience to deal with life's challenges. The curriculum is not set in stone, it evolves over time to meet the needs of a changing society. While change should be planned carefully, we must have the bravery to build on the existing excellence of our curriculum and make sure it is fit for the future.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a leading professional body representing more than 19,000 members, including education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads and business managers of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90% of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. ASCL works to shape national education policy, provide advice and support to members and deliver first-class professional development across the sector.