

ASCL'S MANIFESTO FOR THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION: SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The next government will come to power at one of the most difficult moments in recent history. It will need to deal with multiple, inter-connected challenges, and to plot a course towards a more positive future.

Education, as ever, is key to that aim. The incoming government must seize the opportunity to see education as an investment, and all those who work in it as key partners in the path to a better, happier, more equal and more prosperous future.

ASCL's manifesto for the 2024 general election sets out a roadmap to that destination. We would urge all political parties to engage with its recommendations, and to commit to enacting them if they are granted the opportunity to do so.

Read the full manifesto at www.ascl.org.uk/manifesto

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION

ASCL's 24,000 members – all serving leaders in primary, secondary, specialist and post-16 education across the UK – tell us that the biggest challenges they currently face are as follows:

1

A RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

A sufficient supply of high-quality leaders, teachers and support staff in our schools and colleges is essential if we are to maintain or improve current educational standards and enable children and young people to develop the knowledge and skills to which they are entitled – and which we need as a nation. This foundational aspect of our education system – one of the key responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education – is crumbling.

Addressing the recruitment and retention crisis in education must be a top priority of any incoming government. Failing to do so will render any other plans for education impossible.

2

A WIDENING DISADVANTAGE GAP

Pre-pandemic, the attainment gap between richer and poorer children and young people was narrowing, albeit glacially slowly. Since then, we have started to go backwards. In 2022, the attainment gap at age 16 between poor children and their wealthier peers had increased by the largest annual amount since comparable statistics have been available.

This disadvantage gap – and the fact that it is now widening – is a blight on our society. Any government committed to improving social equity – or 'levelling up' – must find ways to reverse this trend as soon as possible.

3

EVER-EXPANDING EXPECTATIONS ON SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

ASCL members tell us that schools and colleges are having to support pupils with much more than learning. They are providing mental health and counselling support, employing more pastoral and attendance support staff, employing their own educational psychologists, and providing support such as food banks and uniforms for children living in poverty. And they are doing this with no additional resources. This is having a profound impact on their ability to focus on their core purpose – education.

The next government must commit to rebuilding the support services children and young people desperately need – particularly post pandemic – so that schools and colleges can focus on teaching and learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE NEXT GOVERNMENT DO?

ASCL would advise any incoming government to commit to policies in the following areas, in order to tackle these challenges. You can read more detail on these proposals in the full version of our manifesto: www.ascl.org.uk/manifesto

1

TO ADDRESS THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

- Provide much-needed investment to improve teacher and leader pay
- Introduce other incentives and remove barriers to joining and remaining in teaching and leadership
- Take meaningful action to reduce teacher and leader workload and improve wellbeing
- Reduce the pressure of accountability on leaders and teachers
- Promote professionalism, equality, diversity and inclusion in the school and college workforce

2

TO NARROW THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

- Improve school and college funding and how this is distributed
- Implement and build on current plans to reform the SEND system
- Implement an incremental programme of curriculum and assessment reform, to ensure these are fit for purpose for all children and young people
- Work with industry to rapidly scale up the number of high-quality apprenticeships available to young people

3

TO ENABLE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES TO FOCUS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Take meaningful action to end child poverty
- Re-invest in children's services, and clarify where the responsibilities of schools and colleges beyond education begin and end.

CONCLUSION

The political, economic and health challenges of the last few years have taken a major toll on our children and young people. The impact has fallen unequally, with those living in poverty bearing a particularly heavy burden.

Schools and colleges are at the frontline of dealing with the fallout, doing their best to provide the education and support their pupils need with dwindling resources and significant impact on the health and wellbeing of their staff.

This must change. We cannot continue to run our education system, and the people within it, into the ground.

We urge all parties to commit to rebuilding the education system, and to implementing the proposals set out in our manifesto. ASCL will do everything in its power to support the incoming government to enact the changes we so urgently need.

Read the full manifesto at www.ascl.org.uk/manifesto

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association for all school and college leaders. We are proud to support and represent over 24,000 school, college, and trust leaders of primary, secondary, specialist and post-16 education from across the UK. Our members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people, in both the state and independent sectors.