

GENERAL ELECTION 2024

The Association of School and College Leaders calls on all politicians to commit to:

- 1 End child poverty.** It is simply appalling that 4.3 million children live in poverty in the UK. Children are not in a fit condition to learn if they are cold, hungry, and live in housing that is inadequate. Ending child poverty must be a national priority. As an immediate step, free school meals should be extended to all families in receipt of Universal Credit and a process of automatic enrolment implemented.
- 2 Immediate action to rescue the special educational needs system.** Children are missing out on vital support because of delays in education, health and care plans; schools cannot afford the costs of SEND provision and there aren't enough places in special schools to meet demand. The whole system is on the brink of collapse.
- 3 Address the education funding crisis.** Schools across the country are having to set deficit budgets and plan further cuts to provision. This is not sustainable. All schools and colleges must be funded sufficiently. Education should be treated by policymakers as an investment – in children and our country – rather than as a cost.
- 4 Invest in support services for children and families.** The decimation of Sure Start centres, and lack of capacity in children's social care and mental health support services have left schools and colleges picking up the pieces as an unofficial fourth emergency service. Vulnerable children need specialist support services and schools must be able to focus on education.
- 5 Tackle teacher shortages.** Long-term erosion of teacher pay has made it uncompetitive, and high levels of workload are driven by the underfunding of education and punitive accountability (Ofsted inspections and performance tables). The solution is inescapable – better pay and conditions to improve recruitment and retention.
- 6 Fix school and college buildings.** Years of underinvestment have left around 700,000 pupils learning in schools that need major rebuilding or refurbishment. Many schools are riddled with asbestos and others are disrupted by the problem of crumbling concrete. All school and college buildings should be safe, comfortable environments.
- 7 Improve the fortunes of the 'forgotten third.'** The way that our exams system operates means that every year about a third of children do not achieve at least a grade 4 in GCSE English and maths. This rules them out from many education and career options and condemns them to a grinding cycle of mandatory resits with many falling short of a grade 4 once again. We have to do better for these young people.
- 8 Stop the 'bonfire of the BTECs.'** Many tried and tested applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, are being defunded as part of ill-conceived government reforms. This will reduce student choice and lead to young people dropping out of post-16 education.
- 9 Ditch single-phrase Ofsted judgements.** They drive stress and anxiety, damaging the wellbeing and morale of education staff. Negative ratings stigmatise schools making improvement harder to secure. Schools and colleges should not be reduced to a label.
- 10 Celebrate schools, colleges, and our fantastic education staff.** Some politicians are quick to snipe at schools over issues such as sex education, gender-questioning children and policies on mobile phones when schools are already doing a good job on these matters. This denigration must stop. We need a more positive discourse about education.

Read our General Election manifesto at www.ascl.org.uk/manifesto and support our campaign #EducationMatters.