

**University of Leeds Centre for Policy Studies in Education (CPSE) Seminar**

Nic Dakin MP, Shadow Schools Minister and Labour Party MP for Scunthorpe

on

*Labour's policy vision for schooling*

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My first teaching job was on the Preston Road Estate in Hull. I could see the cranes of the docks from my classroom window. A dramatic reminder of the relationship between education and the world of work and our role as teachers – like cranes - in lifting horizons and raising aspirations.

But education didn't just happen in the classroom. It happened taking youngsters on week long camps in the North York Moors. It happened taking youngsters for their first experience of live theatre in Hull, transformed into next year's UK City of Culture.

Experiences beyond my students' world but on their doorstep.

And it happened by getting the best results for them, pioneering early entry for A level English Language, giving them the qualifications and experiences that would be passports to future success.

Comprehensive education revolutionised the life chances generations of working class children like myself allowing us to achieve great things in all walks of life. Last month we celebrated the 100 year anniversary of Harold Wilson's birth.

Revolutionary comprehensive education and the Open University are amongst his greatest legacies and some of the greatest motors of social mobility. A

renaissance in further education was part of this with the birth of sixth form colleges – like John Leggott College in Scunthorpe where I was Principal prior to my election in 2010 - as the response of many Local Education Authorities to Tony Crosland's Circular 10/65

In contrast today's government too often focuses on the wrong things. It's in danger of replacing a spiral of success with ever decreasing circles of failure; rolling back so much of the progress we've made. It's a government fixated with structures.

It sees academisation as the panacea for school improvement. The Education and Adoption Bill that stumbled its way through Parliament further centralised powers in the hands of the Secretary of State cutting parental choice out of the system. And now we have the Secretary of State saying she is going to turn all good and outstanding schools into academies without giving any good reason why.

Under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Labour's sponsored academy programme did a huge amount to transform a small number of persistently failing schools in disadvantaged areas - and brought much needed investment, support and innovation. That's a legacy to be proud of.

But it was never about turning all schools into academies. Because there is no evidence that academisation, in and of itself, leads to school improvement. So what is Labour's agenda? You might ask. What is Labour doing about all this? What would a Labour future look like?

Well the first thing to say is that even with a fair wind, strong leadership and an attractive prospective for the future Labour isn't going to be in government before 2020. So we have to first of all do opposition well. And I think – I would do wouldn't I – that the Labour Education Team that is now in place is doing a good job at this point in the cycle.

Led by Lucy Powell, Shadow Secretary of State, the team comprises myself leading on Schools including post-16, Gordon Marsden leading on FE and HE, Sharon Hodgson leading on Special Educational Needs, Jenny Chapman leading on pre-school and early years, and Mike Watson in the Lords. As with all teams there is overlap and a need to work strongly together. Whereas the Government has all the resources of the state to draw on to support them in their work including the whole of the Department for Education and an army of special advisers we have 2 special advisers between us! So we have to draw on the skills of others in the professional associations and elsewhere, and we have to focus.

Our priority concerns since the election have been the twin crises in teacher supply and school place planning. We also have the gathering storm of ill planned changes to the curriculum and assessment. And head teachers tell us that the 8% reduction in real terms funding over the lifetime of this parliament is a massive challenge, particularly for post-16.

We are facing a chronic shortage of teachers with many at breaking point; more teachers left the profession than joined this year and teacher recruitment is falling year on year.

We have the highest number of teachers quitting the profession since records began. And in teacher training the government has thrown away the tried and tested in favour of its own pet schemes. Add to that mix trainee teachers having to pay for their training and we have the perfect storm. But – even now government Ministers – are coy about admitting there's a problem. In the real world people tell me a different story!

We have a places crisis in many areas with the rising birth rate putting enormous pressure on primary places and now secondary. New figures reveal that one in four primary schools is now full or over capacity – and this figure is rising. And forecasts show there will be 295,000 more primary-age pupils in the system by 2020.

The number of young children in supersize classes has more than tripled since 2010, and parents are finding it harder to get a place for their child. Last year more than 20,000 children (above 15%) did not receive any of their named school preferences. And the Daily Telegraph predicted on national offer day based on responses to FoI requests that the number of pupils not getting one of their top 3 choices has nearly doubled in some areas of the country compared to last year.

Councils can't direct academies to expand to take more pupils. With the Conservative Government's plan to force every school to become an academy, there's a real danger that the already broken system for school places will implode.

With local areas struggling to ensure sufficient school places a wiser government would give councils the tools they need to tackle the problem. Councils should have the power to ensure sufficient places in their area through having the ability to expand any good or outstanding school in their area to meet demand. Even the Conservative led Local Government Association agrees with us on this.

Teacher supply and school places need planning both nationally and locally. That's why we have made it clear that Labour would give local authorities the power to carry out the necessary oversight role which they would be accountable to local people. Without this who is responsible and accountable for the success or otherwise of **all** the young people in a locality.

On the curriculum and assessment we have seen the government abandon its ill thought out plans for baseline assessment and end up red faced on its Key Stage 1 test. Meanwhile A level syllabuses for first teaching in September still haven't passed through Ofqual! I was in both Walton Girls' High School in Grantham and Leys Farm Junior School in Scunthorpe last week. The message from leadership teams and governors was consistent. Stop giving us change at break neck pace and let us do things properly.

We have broken down Labour's policy development agenda into three areas. Firstly giving children a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Start in life ensuring early intervention and a step change in the early years. Labour's Education Policy Commission has begun work on this and anyone can contribute to our thinking. Poorer children

already start school almost a year behind their better off peers and this gap grows as they progress through education. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is growing and is now wider than it was in 2010. Parenting, services for families, childcare and early help and prevention are all key. We will develop plans to deliver a step change in the early years, ensuring that zero to five is given equal status and considered just as important as primary and secondary education.

Secondly we need a system of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools – preparing young people for the modern world with a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. Teacher supply and quality are vital as is collaboration and partnership to deliver the best outcomes. And we need to be able to measure a child's progress across the schools system by creating a system which supports progress, stretches pupils and raises aspiration.

Thirdly we need to deliver 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills that equip young people for work and their role as citizens. This means high quality 14-19 education that values vocational routes including apprenticeships .

Crucial to a Labour landscape is better business- education links. There is some fantastic work going on in pockets across the country. Everyone will know of something happening that is truly wonderful, truly transformational. I could probably go round this hall and everyone could give me an example. But nearly always the arrangement is dependent on particular individuals, fragile and vulnerable to the sort of pressures that I've just mentioned.

When I led a review of skills for the Humber LEP it was clear from all the evidence we gathered from employers, schools and colleges that there is huge will from both education and business to do work together but the pressure on the different bottom lines means it's difficult to resource the coordination to make things happen.

A Labour Government would work with business and education to revolutionise work experience, pathways into work and links outside the classroom to raise aspiration. We would look at how we can connect supply and demand in terms of young people leaving schools and the skills our economy needs and how can we measure this and make schools more accountable for students' destination.

We would ensure all young people have access to effective careers information, advice and guidance that helps them to choose a path that is right for them.

We would match the curriculum to the needs of young people and the needs of the world of work.

If we fail as a nation to deliver high quality, relevant education that the next generation deserve we will limit their opportunity and hold our economy back.

Today, as a constituency MP, I'm embroiled in a fight to save our Steel Industry – a crucial reminder of the link between education and the world of work. At John Leggott we always had more than the national average of students taking STEM subjects and their achievement was high. We had units of work in Chemistry built around the process of steel production. Students from across

the curriculum would spend their summers doing practical projects at the steelworks – often resulting in significant savings to the company. Industry and education links are transforming student's lives, and inspiring future generations of workers in high skill, high tech businesses.

Science, technology and engineering are in Scunthorpe's DNA. Tata, even in the dogdays of its ownership of the steelworks, remains committed to one of the best apprenticeship schemes in the country. Skills are crucial to the industry's future success. And whilst we confront the immediate challenges facing the future of our great steel industry we shouldn't miss the longer term challenge which is around having the high level skills to compete in the steel industry of the future.

This longer term challenge needs all our schools and colleges to deliver for our young people. It needs them to work together in the community and the country's best interests. It needs the very best teachers knowing that we value their work delivering the very best learning. And it needs the learning in the classroom, and the curriculum followed, to prepare young people for the world of tomorrow so they can arrive work ready and eager to contribute both as a worker and a citizen.