

Annual Conference Resolutions 2006

Selection at 11

(1) It is an appalling indictment of a Labour Government in its third term that vast numbers of children in England are still being labelled failures at 11 through the discredited 11+ system whereas it has been eliminated in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Conference calls on the Government to end this discrimination against English children by ending selection at 11.

(2) The SEA urges the Labour Party and the trade union movement to reaffirm their longstanding commitment to ending selection within the school system. It therefore calls upon the Party's MPs to pursue this policy in Parliament in dealing with educational legislation and to oppose government policies which may undermine it in any way.

(3) This SEA Conference finds it incomprehensible that that this Labour Government now in its third term, despite constant avowals that it will not countenance a return to the 11+ and a plethora of Education Acts, has refused to end selection which still fails thousands of children every year in over one tenth of England. It calls upon the Government even at this late stage to amend the Education and Inspections Bill in order to abolish selection in England just as the Labour Party has had the courage and foresight to do in Wales and Scotland.

Equity and marketisation

(4) The involvement of the market in the education service inevitably creates inequality in the funding of schools. It is clear that the greater the investment in schools the higher the outcomes; a multi-tier service will develop. The market also opens schools to funders with extreme ideas. Conferences requires a system of fair funding, one which takes account of the school's community and one which is open to democratic accountability.

Building Schools for the Future

(5) No-one wants to look a gift-horse in the mouth, but there are grounds for thinking that BSF, the government's Building Schools for the Future programme, is a Trojan horse, both for what is proposed, and how it is being done.

The SEA urges greater transparency about BSF on the part of the DfES, and caution and greater enquiry about it on the part of receiving school staff, governors and councils.

Teaching of English

(6) Conference is alarmed that the cautionary tale about the state of the teaching of English revealed in OFSTED's *English 2000-5: a review of inspection evidence* and in QCA's *English 21 Playback: a national conversation on the teaching of English (2005)* appears to be completely ignored in QCA's *Functional Skills Draft Standards: English, mathematics and ICT (2006)* which could lead to students being drilled in the mechanics of language to get them through a test rather than being introduced to the rich possibilities of language and the creative imagination. We call upon the Secretary of State to consult fully with practitioners before condemning a generation of students to soul-destroying rather than life-enhancing studies.

Synthetic Phonics

(7) Conference expresses concern that the Government is proposing to legislate to force all primary schools to use synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading. Legislation should have no part to play in determining teaching methods in schools. Such decisions should be made by schools and the teaching profession.

Remodelling the Workforce

(8) Conference views with increasing concern the manner in which the remodelling of the workforce agenda is being used to replace teachers with higher level teaching assistants for extended periods of the school day. The principle of quality support for qualified teachers is the key to raising standards; replacing teachers with support staff will only undermine the progress made since 1997.

Adult Education

(9) Conference supports NIACE, the WI, the WEA, Pensioner Groups and LGA students who have strongly opposed cuts in adult education funding which will continue for several years. We note that even Government ministers are predicting the loss of 500,000 adult students' places by 2008.

A main group affected will be older women.

SEA is deeply disturbed that a Labour Government has embarked upon such a retrograde and short-sighted strategy.

We welcome increased public spending on younger age groups, but the demographic change needs also to be addressed by a Labour Government with 21st century vision. Sweden offers a good example with two and a half million adult participants in study circles and 147 folk high schools (adult residential colleges).

Britain with its larger population should proportionately have 15 million adults on liberal adult education courses and about 700 residential colleges.

This motion is not however utopian - SEA simply wants to reverse the current trend and to move nearer to the Swedish model not least because we are conscious of the health benefits adult education brings to older adults and the concomitant savings to social services and the NHS.

Secretary of State and S.E.A. Conference

(10) SEA Conference regrets that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, despite having received an invitation immediately on his appointment to the post, was unwilling to attend the SEA Conference and has not yet responded to our request for a meeting on the Education and Inspections Bill. To add insult to injury the Minister for Schools, to whom the Secretary of State forwarded the invitation, took three weeks to discover he too could not attend. Conference is appalled at this treatment of the only educational organisation affiliated to the Labour Party and requests an early meeting between the Officers of SEA and the Secretary of State to discuss the situation.

Children with special needs

(11) There are a small number of children who cannot be comfortably integrated into mainstream schools and that therefore the demand to close all special schools by 2020 cannot be supported; in fact the number of places in schools for autistic pupils needs to be increased since most of this

provision is currently supplied by the private sector.

There is a reservoir of expertise and resources in the special sector that must be preserved and developed. This includes staff with understanding of the needs of different types of children including specialities such as signing, use of diagnostics, physiotherapy, psychology etc.

We must oppose local authorities that close special schools because they cannot find the money or because they experience difficulties in appointing staff. Although this is done under the name of inclusion, it is actually cost cutting. We can only approve the closure of a special school if it is replaced by a better source of expertise, which will probably cost more money rather than less.

The best provision for the vast majority of children with special needs is with their peers in a mainstream primary or comprehensive school, supported, as appropriate, by well-qualified staff with specialist knowledge, equipment and quiet room provision. This applies to a wide range of pupils, who were previously let down by low expectations in the special sector (including wheel chair users, Down's Syndrome children, sensory impaired children and those with general or specific learning difficulties). We do not agree with those teachers who would reject such pupils, but do demand that children should not be parachuted into unprepared classrooms. Their inclusion must be planned and supported by a team of qualified teachers, teaching assistants and by training for the mainstream teachers.

The same argument applies to children with such conditions as ADHD and EBD in general, with the proviso that staff must be protected. For this to be the case, school systems of behaviour management must be good, the leadership team must be visible and competent and the whole staff must be trained in assertive discipline. When behaviour crosses the line into violence, harassment, intimidation or criminality, then the police and LA must be informed and exclusion available as a last resort. Exclusion appeals must involve the LA as well as governors to eliminate some of bad decisions made by governors. Pupils at that point must not be abandoned to hang around the precinct but must be provided with care, including anger management in supportive centres, with the mission to return them to mainstream education as soon as is practicable and safe.

Looked after children form a special category of vulnerable pupils, who are likely to get involved in exclusion processes. While not condoning the behaviour that leads to exclusion, schools must provide a strong degree of support to such pupils, including mentoring, facilities for homework and liaison with care home workers (who are now part of children's services and must be involved in a much more active parenting role). Children's services

must end the practice of moving looked after children (sometimes several times in their school career). There must also be much better liaison with providers of health care for young people involved in addiction and/or self-harm.

School leadership and Governance

(12) Conference calls on NEC to undertake an examination of different forms of school leadership and governance in order to establish models which would achieve a system which is more democratic, accountable and less hierarchical.