



**NEW DEAL
FOR TEACHERS**

POLITICAL BRIEFING

Independent Schools

Introduction

Independent schools are an important and valued part of the education landscape. We want to see all schools thriving and for teachers to benefit from working conditions and job security that will enable them to excel.

Approximately 570,000 (7%) of pupils in England are educated in independent schools. The majority of independent schools in the UK have charitable status and are exempt from the payment of Value Added Tax (VAT).

Labour has pledged to remove the VAT exemption from independent schools, which the party estimate will create revenue of approximately £1.6 billion pounds. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimate that this would bring in £1.3 to £1.5 billion, a marginally lower figure. Business rate exemptions for private schools in Scotland have already been cut.

It has been stated that funding from the removal of VAT exemption will go towards funding Labour's education policy commitments, including an additional 6,500 teachers. However, it has also been argued that the removal of VAT exemption will result in a loss of jobs for teachers currently working in the independent schools sector. There is no definitive data on the number of schools at risk of closure or contraction at this time.

We do not want to see teachers lost to the system at a time when there is a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. A clear education workforce strategy is needed to ensure that these skilled professionals remain in the teaching profession.

Analysis

The popular image of an independent school is an establishment, such as Eton or Winchester, which educates the most privileged in our society, commanding high fees and endowments. In reality, there are a wide range of independent providers which make up the independent education landscape, including small schools, faith schools and special schools. Many places in independent special schools are funded by the taxpayer, often at premium cost.

The removal of VAT exemption may disproportionately affect those schools already struggling to secure the levels of income they need to remain operationally viable.

No one wants to see any school – whether in the state sector or independent school – facing financial pressures that are to the detriment of children's education. However, the last 14 years have seen real terms cuts to education and the provision of children's services to the detriment of children, young people and families.

We don't believe that parents should be left with no other option than to pay for their child's education. It is the responsibility of the Government to invest in the additional and specialist support that children need. Regrettably, too often, children with additional needs have been let down by a lack of investment from the Government.

The impact on pupils who benefit from a bursary or scholarship, and those pupils with special education needs but who do not have an education, health and care plan (EHCP), should also be considered carefully. The Independent Schools Council estimates that over 95,000 pupils are receiving SEND support in the independent sector – but they do not have an EHCP.

Priorities

The next government is going to be facing real challenges with the state of the public finances. It will be for the electorate to decide on who has the policies that will deliver the best for children, young people and their teachers.

NASUWT will be seeking more detail about how the removal of VAT exemption will be applied in practice. We believe that independent school employers should be given time to prepare for any changes and that it should be a priority of the Government to engage with the sector to seek to ensure that children's education and teachers' jobs are protected.

We believe that, irrespective of the removal of VAT exemption, the next government should work to ensure there is better value for money in the use of public funds when sponsoring places in independent special schools. The next government will also need to ensure that any increased demand from parents of pupils leaving the independent sector to return to the state sector is also addressed, including additional demand for SEND support.

We have seen an increasing number of independent schools requiring parents to pay more in fees each year whilst paying teachers less and cutting teachers' contractual pension entitlements. Some of those same schools are egregiously threatening teachers with the prospect of fire and rehire so they can inflict detrimental changes onto teachers' contractual terms and conditions whilst holding significant financial reserves. We want to see the next government taking the opportunity to clamp down on unscrupulous employer practices and to ensure that employers invest in teachers.

About Us

NASUWT is The Teachers' Union and is the voice of the teaching profession.

Our aim is to improve and protect the status, morale and working conditions of the teaching profession so that teachers and headteachers can provide the best education and support to children and young people.

We are committed to ensuring that teachers and headteachers are recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals with working conditions that enable them to focus on their core role of leading teaching and learning.

Further Information

For further information, please email campaigns@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

nasuwt.org.uk