



# King's Speech 2024: Education

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This research briefing sets out the Labour Party's commitments covering education, drawing on its manifesto and other material in the public domain. It has been written in advance of the King's Speech to help members of the House of Lords prepare for the debate on the speech. It does not constitute official information about the government's intentions or provide a complete list of bills to be announced.

Labour's manifesto sets out five missions it said would rebuild the UK. One of these missions was to "break down barriers to opportunity by reforming our childcare and education systems, to make sure there is no class ceiling on the ambitions of young people in Britain".<sup>1</sup> The manifesto also contained Labour's planned "first steps for change", which included plans to recruit 6,500 teachers in key subjects, paid for by ending tax breaks for private schools.<sup>2</sup>

## I. Schools

### I.1 VAT on private school fees

Independent schools, also known as private schools, charge fees for pupils to attend them.<sup>3</sup> They do not have to teach the national curriculum, but must be inspected regularly. Some schools specialise in teaching children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In some cases, local authorities fund children to attend independent special schools with education, health and care (EHC) plans.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 6–7% of pupils in the UK are educated in independent schools.<sup>5</sup> This equates to around 560,000 to 570,000 pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 13. Education policy in the UK is devolved, therefore some pledges will only directly affect policy in England. Tax is a reserved area; therefore, the removal of the VAT exemption would apply to independent schools across the UK.

<sup>2</sup> As above, p 10.

<sup>3</sup> HM Government, '[Types of school: Private schools](#)', accessed 9 July 2024.

<sup>4</sup> HM Government, '[Special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\) and alternative provision \(AP\) improvement plan: Right support, right place, right time](#)', March 2023, CP 800, p 87.

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, '[Tax, private school fees and state school spending](#)', 11 July 2023.





The Labour Party manifesto included a pledge to end the current VAT exemption and business rates relief for private schools. It estimated that this would raise approximately £1.5bn each year.<sup>6</sup> The manifesto stated that the money raised would be invested in state schools on measures such as investing in 6,500 new teachers; increased teacher and headteacher training; delivering work experience and career advice for all young people; early language development in primary schools; Ofsted reform; over 3,000 new nurseries; mental health support for every school; and ‘young futures hubs’.<sup>7</sup>

At present, independent schools do not have to charge VAT on their fees because there is an exemption for the supply of education.<sup>8</sup> This also means that independent schools cannot recover VAT in most circumstances.<sup>9</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) predicts that removing tax exemptions from independent schools, of which VAT forms a significant proportion, would result in an effective VAT rate of 15% “after allowing for input deductions, likely VAT on boarding fees and exemptions for specialist provision”.<sup>10</sup> Tax is a reserved area; therefore, the removal of the VAT exemption would apply to independent schools across the UK. The spending of any additional funds would, however, be a matter for the devolved nations because education policy is devolved.

Independent special schools represent a third of special schools and educate 5% of pupils with EHC plans.<sup>11</sup> In 2022, local authorities placed over 20,000 children and young people in independent special schools. Most of the funding for these schools comes from the state. Speaking to LBC radio on 18 June 2024, Labour leader Keir Starmer stated that there would be an exemption from the scheme for affected pupils. This would apply to those children with SEND and an EHC plan that made specific provisions regarding private schools:

If it’s part of the plan, and the plan, because of the particular needs, can only be met in a private school, then that child or that fee is exempt from our scheme, and therefore they are outside of the change that we’re making.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 127.

<sup>7</sup> Originally announced in October 2023, the Labour Party describes young futures hubs as a national network that will seek to bring local services together, deliver support for teenagers at risk of being drawn into crime or facing mental health challenges and, where appropriate, deliver universal youth provision. Labour Party, [‘Labour will launch young futures programme to tackle knife crime’](#), 10 October 2023.

<sup>8</sup> [Value Added Tax Act 1994](#), sch 9.

<sup>9</sup> Grant Thornton, [‘Changing private schools’ VAT status: What would it actually mean?’](#), 21 June 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, [‘Tax, private school fees and state school spending’](#), 11 July 2023.

<sup>11</sup> HM Government, [‘Special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\) and alternative provision \(AP\) improvement plan: Right support, right place, right time’](#), March 2023, CP 800, p 87.

<sup>12</sup> Global player, [‘Sir Keir Starmer takes your calls on LBC’](#), 18 June 2024, 1:34:10.



A number of commentators have attempted to model the impact of the proposed measures, looking at issues such as the impact on pupil numbers at independent schools; potential independent school closures; the amount of tax which might be collected from the changes; and the impact of the changes on SEND provision. More information about these models can be found in the House of Lords Library briefing, '[Independent schools: Proposed tax changes](#)' (17 May 2024).

## 1.2 Teacher recruitment and retention

Labour's manifesto stated that the party would spend £450mn of the yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools to recruit 6,500 "expert" teachers.<sup>13</sup> Labour leader Keir Starmer has provided the example of the need to increase maths teachers.<sup>14</sup> In addition, any new teacher entering the classroom would be required to be working towards qualified teacher status. A further £270mn would be used to improve teacher and headteacher training. Labour claimed that teachers "are burnt out and leaving in droves",<sup>15</sup> and argued it would get more teachers into shortage subjects, support areas that face recruitment challenges, and tackle retention issues.<sup>16</sup> Among the proposals were:

- a review of the way bursaries are allocated and the "structure of retention payments"
- update the early career framework for teachers, maintaining "its grounding in evidence"
- ensure any new teacher entering the classroom "has, or is working towards" qualified teacher status
- introduce a new teacher training entitlement to ensure teachers stay up to date on best practice with continuing professional development
- reinstate the school support staff negotiating body to help address an "acute recruitment and retention crisis in support roles"
- create a mentoring framework, the 'Excellence in Leadership' programme, which it claimed would expand the capacity of headteachers and leaders to improve schools
- introduce regional improvement teams to spread best practice and enhance school-to-school support

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<sup>13</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 127.

<sup>14</sup> Schools Week, '[Labour makes 6,500 extra teachers pledge one of its "steps for change"](#)', 16 May 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 77.

<sup>16</sup> As above, p 82.



Following the general election, newly appointed Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson confirmed in a letter to those working in the education sector that “work to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers for our schools and colleges starts now”.<sup>17</sup> On the same day the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed that it would immediately resume and expand its teacher recruitment campaign, ‘Every lesson shapes a life’, originally rolled out in early 2020. It also said it would restart its further education recruitment campaign, ‘Share your skills’.<sup>18</sup>

The National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) has welcomed Labour’s proposals, stating that the party was “right to focus on the recruitment and retention crisis facing schools”. It argued that “competitive levels of pay and a manageable workload” would be required to make teaching an attractive option.<sup>19</sup> The National Education Union (NEU) also welcomed the manifesto’s focus on recruitment and retention, but argued that 6,500 teachers “while a start, does not go far enough”.<sup>20</sup> It called for “a fully funded pay correction for the educators”, in addition to effective solutions to workload issues. More information is available at:

- HM Government, [‘School workforce in England: 2023’](#), June 2024
- Teacher Tapp, [‘Teacher recruitment and retention in 2024’](#), June 2024
- House of Commons Education Committee, [‘Teacher recruitment, training and retention’](#), 17 May 2024, HC 119 of session 2023–24
- House of Commons Library, [‘Teacher recruitment and retention in England’](#), 12 December 2023

### 1.3 Early years and childcare

The Labour Party manifesto stated that the party would allocate £35mn of the yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools to create over 3,000 nurseries.<sup>21</sup> The manifesto stated that this would be achieved by upgrading space in primary schools to deliver the extension of government funded hours to which families are entitled.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the manifesto committed to a review of the parental leave system within the first year of a

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<sup>17</sup> Department for Education, [‘Letter to the education workforce from Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson’](#), 8 July 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, [‘Education secretary beings push to recruit 6,500 new teachers’](#), 8 July 2024.

<sup>19</sup> National Association of Headteachers, [‘NAHT responds to the Labour Party’s 2024 general election manifesto’](#), 13 June 2024.

<sup>20</sup> National Education Union, [‘Labour Party general election manifesto’](#), 13 June 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 127.

<sup>22</sup> As above, p 81.



Labour government “so it best supports working families”, and to introducing a supervised tooth-brushing scheme for 3 to 5-year-olds, targeting the areas of highest need.

On 10 June 2024, prior to Labour’s manifesto launch, the BBC reported estimates that converting classrooms to nurseries would cost approximately £40,000 per classroom under Labour plans to provide 3,334 new nurseries in high-need areas.<sup>23</sup> The IFS reported that Labour was proposing to spend around £135mn to fund the conversion of primary school classrooms to nursery rooms.<sup>24</sup>

In the spring budget 2023, the previous government announced it would be expanding entitlement to free childcare.<sup>25</sup> The Department for Education (DfE) has estimated there will need to be an extra 40,000 workers in the childcare sector by September 2025 to support the entitlement roll-out.<sup>26</sup> The IFS has stated that the Labour Party’s manifesto proposals, which would create 100,000 new nursery places, would fully meet the expected increases in demand from the expansion of entitlement.<sup>27</sup>

Christine Farquharson, an associate director at the IFS, stated that the proposal “may nudge the market in a different direction—but certainly won’t transform it”.<sup>28</sup> The NAHT felt the plans for extended nursery provision could be positive for parents but commented, “they will require careful planning and the right levels of funding so that we don’t put unrealistic expectations onto already stretched school staff”.<sup>29</sup> More information about childcare is available at:

- House of Commons Library, [‘Childcare workforce in England’](#), 29 May 2024
- House of Lords Library, [‘Early years education: Trends, issues and the impacts of Covid-19’](#), 23 November 2023
- House of Commons Education Committee, [‘Support for childcare and the](#)

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<sup>23</sup> BBC News, [‘Labour pledges 100,000 new childcare places’](#), 10 June 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, [‘Labour’s plans to build childcare spaces in schools will nudge the market in a different direction—but not transform it’](#), 9 June 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Department for Education, [‘Budget 2023: Everything you need to know about childcare support’](#), 16 March 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Department for Education, [‘Spring budget 2023: Childcare expansion’](#), April 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, [‘Labour’s plans to build childcare spaces in schools will nudge the market in a different direction—but not transform it’](#), 9 June 2024.

<sup>28</sup> As above.

<sup>29</sup> National Association of Headteachers, [‘NAHT responds to the Labour Party’s 2024 general election manifesto’](#), 13 June 2024.



[early years](#)', 26 July 2023, HC 969 of session 2022–23

- Education Policy Institute, '[Education priorities in the next general election](#)', July 2023, pp 4–11

## 1.4 Curriculum

The Labour manifesto included several commitments relating to the national curriculum in England. These included:<sup>30</sup>

- an 'expert led' review of the curriculum and assessment, which would "consider the right balance of assessment methods whilst protecting the important role of examinations" (the manifesto noted the importance of "an excellent foundation in reading, writing and maths, and support to develop essential digital, speaking, and creative skills")
- putting "rocket boosters" on the promotion of numeracy, improving the quality of maths teaching across nurseries and primary schools
- £5mn yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools to be spent on early language development in primary schools
- supporting children to study a creative or vocational subject until they are 16, and ensuring "accountability measures reflect this"<sup>31</sup>
- protecting time for physical education
- launching a new National Music Education Network, a one-stop shop with information on courses and classes for parents, teachers and children
- spending £85mn of the yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools on delivering work experience and careers advice for all young people<sup>32</sup>
- ensuring that schools "address misogyny and teach young people about healthy relationships and consent"<sup>33</sup>

More information is available in the House of Commons Library briefing, '[Comparing the school curriculum across the UK](#)' (13 July 2023).

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<sup>30</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, pp 82–3.

<sup>31</sup> As above, p 86.

<sup>32</sup> As above, p 44.

<sup>33</sup> As above, p 68.



## 1.5 Standards in schools

The Labour Party manifesto committed to “enhance” the school inspection regime by replacing the single headline grades currently used by Ofsted with a new report card system “telling parents clearly how schools are performing”.<sup>34</sup> The party has said that it will use £45mn of the yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools on the proposed Ofsted reforms. In addition, the party would bring multi-academy trusts into the inspection system and introduce a new annual review of safeguarding, attendance, and off-rolling.<sup>35</sup>

The NAHT has said the reforms to single-word judgements would be “extremely welcome”, arguing that the current system no longer provides useful information to parents or schools. It added that it stood “ready to help design a fairer, proportionate and more humane approach to school accountability”.<sup>36</sup> For more information see:

- Lucas Cumiskey, ‘[Labour Ofsted report cards: How they could work, and the hurdles](#)’, Schools Week, 14 June 2024
- House of Commons Library, ‘[School inspections in England: Ofsted](#)’, 3 July 2023

## 1.6 Mental health in schools

The manifesto included a commitment to spend £175mn of the yearly revenue raised from applying VAT to private schools to provide specialist mental health professionals to provide support for every school.<sup>37</sup> The manifesto also committed to spending £95mn on ‘young futures hubs’, which it said would “provide open access mental health services for children and young people in every community”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> As above, p 83.

<sup>35</sup> Ofsted defines off-rolling as “the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the the [sic] best interests of the pupil”. Ofsted, ‘[What is off-rolling, and how does Ofsted look at it on inspection?](#)’, 10 May 2019.

<sup>36</sup> National Association of Headteachers, ‘[NAHT responds to the Labour Party’s 2024 general election manifesto](#)’, 13 June 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 84.

<sup>38</sup> As above.



In June 2024, a National Education Union survey carried out by Teacher Tapp, a teacher survey platform, found that access to services such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) was one of the most important priorities among 8,000 respondents in the education sector.<sup>39</sup> For more information see:

- House of Lords Library, '[Mental health, wellbeing and personal development in schools](#)', 8 February 2024
- House of Commons Library, '[Children and young people's mental health: Policy and services \(England\)](#)', 26 January 2024

## 1.7 Special educational needs

The statutory basis for identifying children and young people with special educational needs is detailed in the [Children and Families Act 2014](#). A statutory '[Special educational needs and disability \(SEND\): Code of practice](#)' outlines detailed information on the support available for children and young people aged 0 to 25 under the 2014 act. As explained in the House of Commons Library briefing, '[Special educational needs: Support in England](#)' (9 February 2024), there are broadly two levels of support available:<sup>40</sup>

- SEN support, provided to a child or young person in their pre-school, school, or college
- EHC plans which provide a formal basis for support for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN support

In 2023/24 there were over 1.6 million pupils in England with special educational needs (SEN).<sup>41</sup> Of these, 434,354 have an EHC plan; this represents 4.8% of pupils in England. A further 1,238,851 pupils have SEN (SEN support) but no EHC plan; this represents 13.6% of pupils in England. The Labour Party manifesto stated that:

Labour will take a community-wide approach, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs. We will make sure admissions decisions account for the needs of communities and require all schools to cooperate with their local authority on

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<sup>39</sup> Schools Week, '[Retention tops teachers' election policy priorities, polling suggests](#)', 14 June 2024.

<sup>40</sup> House of Commons Library briefing, '[Special educational needs: Support in England](#)', 9 February 2024.

<sup>41</sup> HM Government, '[Special educational needs in England: Academic year 2023/24](#)', 20 June 2024.





school admissions, SEND inclusion, and place planning.<sup>42</sup>

The NAHT has argued that the current SEN funding system is not sustainable.<sup>43</sup> Responding to the Labour manifesto, the NAHT urged any incoming Labour government to “look carefully at the level of funding that is required to rebuild the school system, particularly when it comes to crucial areas such as SEND provision”.<sup>44</sup> For more information see: House of Commons Library, ‘[Special educational needs: Support in England](#)’ (9 February 2024).

## 1.8 Additional schools’ policies

The Labour Party manifesto also included the following commitments which relate to policies in schools:<sup>45</sup>

- bringing down the cost of school by limiting the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require
- funding free breakfast clubs in every primary school, accessible to all children which it said would support parents through the cost-of-living crisis

## 2. Further and higher education

On the issue of further and higher education, the Labour Party manifesto stated that a Labour government would:<sup>46</sup>

- produce “a comprehensive strategy” for post-16 education to set out the role for different providers, and how students could move between institutions, as well as strengthening regulation
- act to improve access to universities and raise teaching standards
- establish Skills England to “bring together business, training providers and

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<sup>42</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 83.

<sup>43</sup> National Association of Headteachers, ‘[Special educational needs funding "not sustainable". NAHT warns](#)’, 13 June 2024.

<sup>44</sup> National Association of Headteachers, ‘[NAHT responds to the Labour Party’s 2024 general election manifesto](#)’, 13 June 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 84.

<sup>46</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, pp 84–6.



unions with national and local government to ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver Labour’s industrial strategy”

- devolve adult skills funding to combined authorities, empowering local leaders to have greater control of skills development in their areas, alongside a greater role in supporting people into work
- Skills England would coordinate between local areas to ensure everyone could access all the opportunities available
- transform further education colleges into specialist technical excellence colleges, which would “work with businesses, trade unions, and local government to provide young people with better job opportunities and the highly trained workforce that local economies need”
- reform the apprenticeships levy to create “a flexible growth and skills levy”
- guarantee training, an apprenticeship, or help to find work for all 18 to 21-year-olds by “drawing together existing funding and entitlements”<sup>47</sup>

The manifesto stated that Labour would “continue to support the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university”.<sup>48</sup> However, it noted:

The current higher education funding settlement does not work for the taxpayer, universities, staff, or students. Labour will act to create a secure future for higher education and the opportunities it creates across the UK. We will work with universities to deliver for students and our economy.

For further information see:

- Further Education Week, [‘Labour’s in-tray for FE and skills’](#), 5 July 2024
- Times Higher Education Supplement, [‘Labour promises “secure future” for “crisis-hit” universities’](#), 13 June 2024
- House of Lords Library, [‘Importance of skills: Economic and social benefits’](#), 16 April 2024; and [‘Higher education: Contribution to the economy and levelling up’](#), 22 February 2024
- House of Commons Library, [‘Apprenticeships policy in England’](#), 20 January 2023; and [‘Apprenticeship statistics for England’](#), 23 January 2024

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<sup>47</sup> As above, p 43.

<sup>48</sup> As above, p 86.

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