

The Socialist Educational Association

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The Socialist Educational Association (SEA) is the only educational organisation affiliated to the Labour Party. We believe that education should be based on equality, democracy and cooperation - not competition.

Labour now promises to:

- end the academies programme;
- bring all schools and central services back to democratic, properly funded Local Authorities;
- end deregulation, privatisation and under-funding of our public services;
- promote an NHS-like National Education Service (NES).

Organisation

- We discuss alternatives to the Tories' narrow, test-driven curriculum that is currently stifling our schools and colleges.
- We show how another system is possible.
- We develop alternative policies for teaching, learning and assessment. We oppose privatisation and casualisation of staff in school, college or university.
- We campaign with unions, parents and other groups to resist the damage that the Tories cause.

History

The association was founded as the National Association of Labour Teachers in the 1920s, but grew into a broader church and was renamed the Socialist Educational Association. The association is organised on a structure of branches, each branch being loosely based on an LEA area. It has a national executive committee which meets eight

times a year. This is composed of nationally elected members; officers, plus eight women and eight men; together with delegates from the branches. The SEA also holds an annual conference in June each year. Caroline Benn was, for a time, the SEA president.

It aims to promote non-selective education, equality of opportunity and lifelong availability of adequate educational provision throughout the UK. It believes in all compulsory education being free and adequately resourced. It seeks to enlist the support of the trade union and cooperative movements and to encourage support for a socialist vision of education amongst teaching staff.

SEA and the Labour Party

The SEA can be described as the Labour Party's critical friend. It participates in the National Policy Forum and Labour's Annual Conference, and has access to members of the Shadow Education Front Bench. We also have a parliamentary branch which includes Labour members of the Education Select Committee.

We believe that Labour's policies on education should be based on our core values of equality, democracy and solidarity. The SEA is currently seeking to engage with the Party to firm up its education policies to ensure that the final Election Manifesto reflects the policies agreed at the National Policy Forum and to develop future policies in line with our aims. The SEA has also been working with a number of other organisations in the 'Reclaiming Education' group to mobilise opinion around what policy changes should be seen as priorities for an incoming Labour government.

Membership of the SEA is open to all members of the Labour Party and to other supporters of our

educational objectives, the only proviso being that SEA members should not belong to another political party. The SEA welcomes affiliation by CLPs, trade unions and union branches. Our policies are democratically decided at Annual Conferences open to all members together with delegates of affiliated bodies, and between conferences by an elected NEC. The setting up of the Members' Area on the SEA website now gives members an additional route for contributing their views and suggestions.

Campaigns

Current activities are a mixture of long-standing aims and contemporary campaigning. The SEA's basic aim has always been to promote a comprehensive, non-selective education service, based on equality of opportunity and life-long access to excellent provision, within which compulsory education is free, well-resourced and organised within a local democratic framework. The SEA is committed to developing policy which is based on research and evidence of what works in the UK and abroad. Like the NHS, locally accountable comprehensive schools - both primary and secondary - are successful and popular expressions of our values and we champion them.

At the present time our main emphasis is on the need to develop democratic and comprehensive alternatives to marketisation and privatisation, which divide communities and increase inequality. Our recent proposals have included the following:

- To develop a single, broad and inclusive framework for the curriculum from early years to adult education. This should include choice, depth, breadth, stretch and progression, and value what learners know and can do so, so that all learners can be proud of their achievements. We want to see an alternative to the bewildering choice of qualifications, which can limit opportunities and lead to segregation by social class.
- To develop ways of targeting educational investment to reduce inequalities and promote achievement as an alternative to regressive spending cuts which hit the poorest hardest. This means keeping educational routes open for all learners throughout life.
- To promote a system of fair admissions, administered by the local education service, and the ending of selection tests.
- To put inclusion and equal opportunities at the heart of education provision, and to ensure that discrimination and segregation are tackled in all their forms. The needs of every child, including

those with SEN and disabilities, should be fully met.

- To promote the development of local authority frameworks providing strong local support and oversight of all local schools.

Focus on 14-19

A bigger, braver and more rounded curriculum that is truly broad and balanced is a longstanding aim of progressive educationalists. Bolstered by a National Education Service (NES), the aim of the next Labour government, if it has the courage to take on the siren voices of the right now embedded in the education establishment and the media, has to be exactly that. This means implementing, in the 14-19 phase, a unified developmental curriculum, where the academic and vocational are equally valued. At its heart, it should be developing the skills and knowledge in our young people that are necessary to engage fully with the modern world in a critical and reflective way. Communication in all its facets, problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking and reflection must feature. It must also be flexible and personalised, allowing young people to choose courses which suit their aspirations and interests. Finally, the assessment model should recognise the achievements of all learners, including those with special educational needs (SENs), rather than segregate them through crude pass/fail measures. We have been close to achieving this bigger, inclusive curriculum previously, notably when the Tomlinson reforms were proposed in 2004 and the short-lived Curriculum 2000 agenda was developed.

A progressive 14-19 curriculum must:

- develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to enable young people to be responsible citizens and independent thinkers. Students should be prepared for employment, competent to make choices and learn throughout their lives;
- prepare 19-year-olds to progress to employment or continue in education, with useful social and learning skills and qualifications that are valuable and understood by both employers and education institutions;
- be sufficiently engaging to retain young people at risk of leaving education, employment and training.