

Education

A Workers Party discussion paper



WORKERS

PARTY

The Workers Party has consistently campaigned for the ending of academic selection in schools and for the end of segregation of children on the grounds of their religion.

Facing the challenges

The Coalition Executive at Stormont has failed to address either of these challenges.

The decision three Education Ministers ago, to end selection has not impacted on schools.

The grammar schools have simply designed their own tests and carried on selecting the children they want.

Even at this level, there is a test favoured by Catholic grammar schools and a different test for the rest.

Even in academic selection, the religious divide remains prevalent.

The Workers Party calls for the end of this educational apartheid and the creation of a single education authority charged with delivering an education system free from religious division and control, fit for the 21st century.

Tinkering with sectarian structures is not acceptable.

There appears to be no wish on the part of the main coalition parties to address these divides. Five years after the Bain Report, it has been discovered that there may be 85,000 surplus places across the school estate.

This may coincide not just with a falling birth rate ten years ago but the fact that many young people have been rejecting the school system or have been rejected by it. How else can it be explained that over 50,000 young people are not in education, employment or training ?

Lowest level of qualifications

Northern Ireland has the lowest proportion of people with graduate qualifications but University places here are capped.

Northern Ireland also has the highest proportion of people leaving school with no qualifications at all.

Severe underachievement by working class Protestant boys was recorded back in 2006, when the Public Accounts Committee confirmed only 4.4% attained second level qualifications in mathematics.

Too many of our kids leaving school cannot count. It should not be surprising then that 50,000 young people are not in employment, education or training?

That attempts to self harm and suicide are on the rise particularly among young men with low self esteem and limited prospects

Statistics from some of the most disadvantaged wards in west Belfast, for both Catholic run and state schools show that more than 80% of young people are now leaving school with no or low qualifications.

The Workers Party has long declared that education is a human right and not be a privilege reserved for the few. Education is recognised across the world as one of the best routes out of poverty.

It should be unacceptable that at every stage of the schooling system, the poorest children do less well given the proven link between low income and low educational performance.

The link between low income and low educational performance must be cut and this is made less likely where minds are diverted to cutting education funding and closing schools, making teachers and classroom assistants redundant.

Investment - not cuts

The case for investment, not cuts is obvious. In Northern Ireland over 20% of children do not attain the standards in literacy and maths (level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 – aged 10) expected for when they leave primary school.

‘The quality of overall provision is not good enough in one third of primary schools’, according to the Chief Inspectors report ‘Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all learners’ in 2009.

The Workers Party suggest the statistics and facts are indefensible.

Successive Education Ministers have failed the majority of children and young people at all levels of the education system.

The working class are failed by the very system that should be supporting them to develop the learning and the skills to contribute to the building of our society. To equip them for a life of learning and meaningful and rewarding employment.



Educational attainment

- 26 % of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland obtained five or more GCSEs but fewer than five at grade C or above.
- 41.6% of the workforce have no qualifications at all: the UK average, without qualifications, is 18.9%
- 25% of the working population are functionally illiterate.

Source: Adult Literacy in Northern Ireland, Kevin Sweeney and Brenda Morgan: A survey of adults 16-25, Central Survey Unit, Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency

Steps to be taken in Education

- Implement the Early Years strategy: Focus resources on early years to help children acquire literacy and numeracy skills;
- Closer departmental working with DHSSPS to maximise the impact of Sure Start spend and better budgeting towards Key Stage 1 pupils;
- Measureable targets to assess schools on the allocation, monitoring and impact for increased investment;
- Targets in Key Stage One and upwards to become Public Service Agreements in the Programme for Government;



- Invest to Save: Children's service planners show £5,000 spent on early intervention is better than £130,000 which is the cost for one child to spend a year in a children's home;
- Work for greater integration: the fragmented and religiously segregated education system has failed to bridge the attainment gap – move to an integrated model of management and pupil mix for all schools and allow the independent sector to fund their own systems;
- Plan for a comprehensive and integrated system at the three levels, primary, second-level and tertiary, to equip current and future generations to develop and contribute as effective citizens.
- Education is a right and not a privilege and every school should be enabled to become a good school at the heart of our community.



Further Information & Contact Details

If you would like to know more about Workers Party in general or a specific policy area, please log on to our website

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Comments

If you have a comment about the Party or any of its policies let us know. You can email your views to the above address or you can comment via the Party website.

Look Left

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Published October 2011

