



independent
schools
council

ISC POLITICAL SUMMARY

Wednesday 20th – Tuesday 26th January 2010

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1. Parliament

Oral Questions

Quite a wide-ranging debate was held with the DCSF's ministers on Monday (25/01/10), beginning with GCSE standards and referencing a point made by ISC's Head of Research some time ago about the decline of modern languages in the state sector:

Nick Gibb MP (Con.: Bognor Regis & Littlehampton):

Is the Minister not concerned that nearly half of the 75,000 children on free school meals do not get a single GCSE above a grade D; that fewer than 4 per cent. of those 75,000 children are even entered for a GCSE in biology, physics or chemistry; that the independent sector now accounts for nearly half of all A* grades in GCSE French and achieves more A grades at A-level than all our comprehensive schools put together; and, most damning of all, that the achievement gap in GCSEs between the poorest areas of the country and the richest is widening—from 20 percentage points last year to a staggering 25 percentage points this year? Why, when pupils and teachers are working harder than ever, are this Government generating deeper and deeper inequalities?

Vernon Coaker MP (Lab.: Gedling):

The key stage 4 results for children on free school meals are rising faster than the average, and between 2002 and 2009 the number of pupils on free school meals achieving the equivalent of five A* to C grades at GCSE rose by 26 percentage points. It does not do the hon. Gentleman justice to keep pointing negatively at the achievements of those on free school meals. Significant improvement has been made in respect of those pupils, many of whose schools face the most difficult and challenging circumstances. Do we want to achieve more? Of course we do, which is why there has been a focus in those schools on standards and why, over time, we will also see an improvement in numeracy and literacy, particularly through the introduction of one-to-one tuition. As I say, there are things that we need to do and we need to do more, but more will not be achieved by simply decrying the achievements of schools that serve the most difficult areas.

Moving later into topical questions, Mark Lancaster MP (Con.: North-East Milton Keynes) asked a question which many teachers in the state sector could take a shot at answering:

Can the Secretary of State estimate how many pages of guidance his Department has issued to teachers in the past 10 years and tell the House whether he considers it sufficient?

Children, Schools and Families Bill (Amendments)

David Laws MP (Lib. Dem.; Yeovil) has tabled an amendment to the [CSF Bill](#) that would prevent the Secretary of State from being able to extent Pupil and Parent guarantees to the independent sector.

The amendment will either: delete Clause 1, Page 2, Subsection (9) of the Bill, or; add 'provided that the bodies added do not include private schools'.

General Election note

Much speculation over the election date. Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth, let slip that the General Election may be – as assumed by many - on May 6th. However, given recent revelations about a £10 million Labour Party campaign funding shortfall there is also speculation about June 3rd, or even late March. A late-March election would of course fall in the Easter holidays for most independent schools, so parents away from home then would need to arrange postal votes.

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register to vote/postal vote application/postal vote application.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register%20to%20vote/postal%20vote%20application/postal%20vote%20application.aspx)

2. Ministerial Statements

Families and Relationships Policy

Wednesday 20th January
Ed Balls MP

Launching a new consultation on family policy, Mr. Balls gave a short speech to the House setting out the Government's initial position. The consultation seeks views on what would increase the acceptability of people seeking help on parenting or relationships, as well as which public services need to become more 'family-friendly'.

The paper also asks three more specific questions concerning compulsory mediation assessment in family law cases (and mediation as an alternative to court action), leave of court, and the creation of a new advice service on family issues modelled on NHS Direct.

A transcript of Mr. Balls' statement is available in Hansard:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100120/wmstext/100120m0001.htm#10012063000011>

The Green Paper *Support for All* is available on the DCSF's website (the questions mentioned above are printed fully on page 134):

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/supportforall>

3. Publications and Press Releases

Government

New SRE Guidance

Monday 25th January

“Young people will be taught how to deal with the pressure and intimidation often caused by exposure to sexual content in the media and on the internet and mobile phones, Ed Balls announced today.

Children will also learn about the importance of marriage and stable relationships to family life, and the value of delaying sexual experiences.

Updated guidance on sex and relationship education (SRE) will be given to schools to help them teach young people how to cope with the pressure they often face from peers and the media. Secondary school pupils will be encouraged to discuss the myths around growing up, sex and relationships that they hear from friends, helping them to put media stories and images into context.”

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2010_0022

4. Organisations and Unions

Ofsted

Tuesday 26th January

School Workforce Reform

This report concerns how successful or otherwise reforms to the school workforce (including teaching assistants and learning mentors) between 2003 and 2009 have been.

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Thematic-reports/Workforce-reform-in-schools-has-it-made-a-difference>

5. Parliamentary Business for the Week Ahead

Wednesday 27th January

09:30, Wilson Room, Portcullis House

Children, Schools and Families Select Committee

Young people not in education, employment or training – Oral evidence session

With evidence from: Demos

Thursday 28th

09:30 & 13:00, Committee Room Nine, Palace of Westminster

Children, Schools and Families Bill Committee

Further consideration of the CSF Bill following the second reading

Monday 1st February

15:45, Room TBC, Portcullis House

Children, Schools and Families Select Committee

The Gifted and Talented Programme – Oral evidence session

Wednesday 3rd

09:30, Room TBC, Portcullis House

Children, Schools and Families Select Committee

The Teaching of STEM Subjects – Oral evidence session

With evidence from: the Institute of Physics; National Science Learning Centre; Reading University

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