

Dear Keir Starmer

Roy Blatchford

January 2023

Dear Keir Starmer

In my January 2022 column speculating on the year ahead, I predicted the downfall of Boris Johnson, and set out some key themes in education which I considered should be addressed afresh: funding, accountability, academisation, the teaching profession.

Well, there was no realistic chance of predicting all the political events which unfolded in 2022, including four education secretaries in the space of as many months. But in that same spirit of speculation, I'll press on....

You are clearly caught between two camps of advisers: the Brown, Miliband, Nandy gang would have you promote *equality*. Streeting, McFadden and Kyle are passionate about *aspiration*.

Your major policy announcement at the end of last year - the abolition of the House of Lords - was greeted with predictable scorn by headline writers and suggests Gordon Brown is winning the argument with you. The equally tired policy of attacking private schools, irrelevant to most of the population who send their children to state schools, reinforces that view.

We are all aware that governments lose elections so you don't want to announce anything that might be misconstrued. Yet dream a decade in power, build momentum with ideas, and the prize of power might just be yours.

As this year unfolds, what about some forward-thinking 'soft opening' announcements to capture the attention of parents, students and the teaching profession? Take us towards 2030 with some excitement and ambition. Think aspiration not equality.

Here are 10 ideas for starters. You might refine these to just five for the pledge card. Remember Tony Blair's vote winning pledge on class sizes!

1. No Reception class larger than 15 - children need that great start in the early years, an investment which will reap dividends socially and politically.
2. A Year of Speech & Language across the nation's schools - 'long Covid' is as much a feature in education as it is in health.
3. A true ambition, and accompanying resources, to ensure every child reads at least in line with their actual age by age 11.
4. Every 10 and 11 year-old guaranteed two years of free musical instrument tuition.
5. High quality BTec provision for all 16-19 year-olds, as a stepping stone into apprenticeships, the workplace and higher education.
6. A radical reshaping of how we examine all GCSEs: 25% oral, 25% portfolio; 25% online, 25% written paper.
7. One term sabbaticals every seven years for all full-time teachers - the pay-back in recruitment and retention would be significant.
8. Ofsted in its current form has outlived its usefulness and lost credibility with parents - its reform must focus on improving teaching and leadership, working with the profession. And see below.
9. The funding apartheid which means primary schools in different areas of the country receive £4,500 or £6,500 per child - this must end. All parents aspire to the best for their children.
10. The DfE is charged with letting schools get on with what they do best, issuing many fewer missives, and celebrating what the nine million children achieve each day in the nation's 24,500 schools.

This column in January 2024 will have something to say about how excited or indifferent the profession is at the prospect of your winning an election later in the year.

Yours sincerely

Roy Blatchford

PS I could rehearse much of the press coverage of Ofsted in recent months and give examples of the following: how the inspectorate has deliberately downgraded some outstanding schools; how it has failed to report meaningfully on pupils' progress and attainment; how it has misjudged safeguarding thereby confusing parents and damaging the reputations of leaders, teachers and students; how public money is wasted when schools which meet the outstanding criteria are told to hold their breath for another year; and how the inspectorate fails to grasp the nettle in some evidently 'good and declining' schools. Ofsted will be on the run in 2023, teeing up vital reform into 2024.