

Comparing Manifestos - Part 3

In the run up to this May's general election, *Schools Week* will analyse the manifestos of various education organisations, typically from opposite ends of the political spectrum. This third pre-election comparison is between the Independent Academies Association and the Association of School and College Leaders

THE INDEPENDENT ACADEMIES ASSOCIATION

The Independent Academies Association (IAA) is, unsurprisingly, a membership organisation dedicated to supporting the leaders of academies.

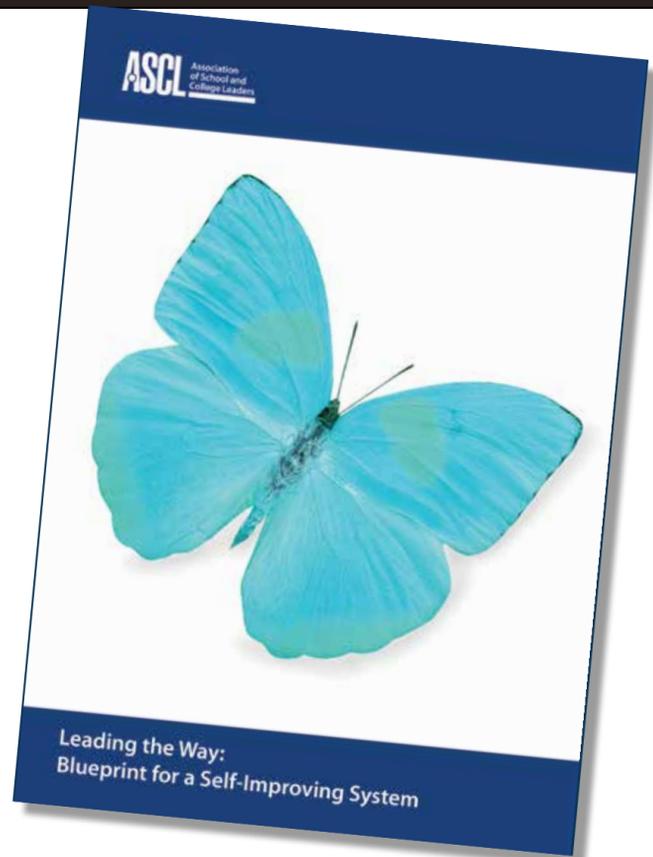
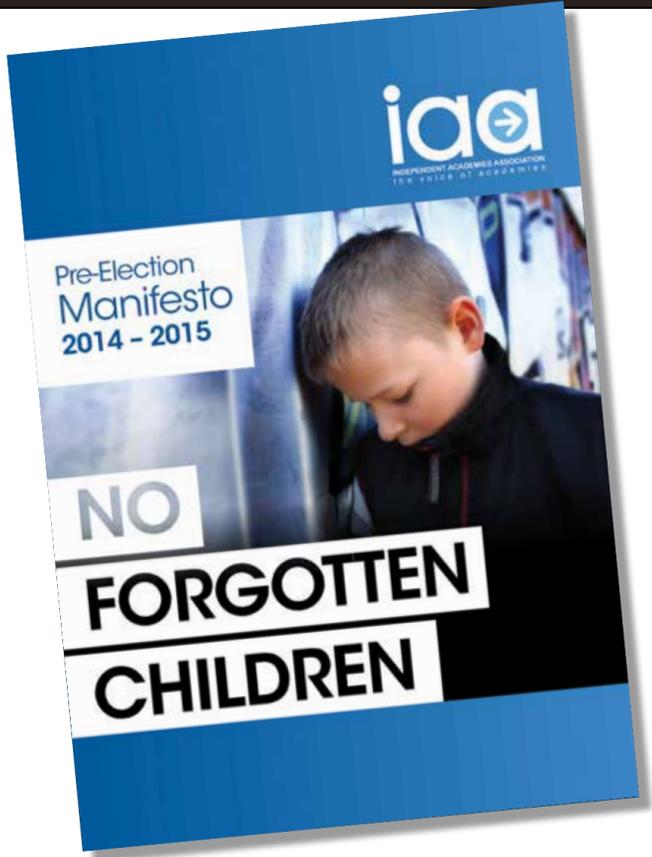
Its honorary president is Lord Andrew Adonis, the driving force behind the academies programme under the last government. He was minister of state for education under Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown.

The remit of academies has changed over the years; from being solely for under-performing comprehensives to a wide-ranging brief that allows any school to convert to academy status. There are now more than 4,500 academies and free schools in England.

The IAA acts as a "non-partisan" organisation and consults with the government on educational policy. Its manifesto, "No Forgotten Children", was put together using key issues



raised by its members and through discussions at its board meetings. The draft manifesto, launched at its autumn conference, was released for consultation after fine-tuning following feedback. It will be used as a basis for pre-election lobbying work. It aims to "advance education for the public good" by acting collaboratively; maximise achievement, attainment and progress at academies; use innovative practice to raise educational standards; and use academies' independence "for the benefit of the communities" they serve.



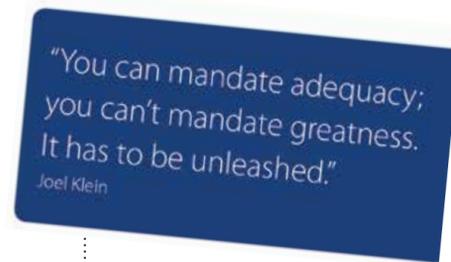
ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LEADERS

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,000 secondary heads, deputy heads, bursars, business managers and college principals.

Its manifesto is in the form of a "blueprint" and is entitled "Leading The Way: Blueprint for a Self-improving System".

ASCL commissioned Professor Toby Greany from the Institute of Education to undertake a literature review into what international evidence says about the performance of the English education system, and what the evidence says the next steps might be to improve it further.

The association also consulted during the last autumn term with the profession, academics, policymakers and politicians. It also held roundtables with both the former and current secretaries of state, the shadow secretary of state and the minister of state



for education. The blueprint was launched on February 25, at a parliamentary reception hosted by education select committee chair Graham Stuart.

The ASCL said it has since been endorsed by all three political parties and would work with the incoming government in May "to take forward specific policy proposals in the blueprint".

WHAT THE LEADER SAYS

As might be expected, the IAA's manifesto is clear in its support for academies and free schools, calling for the leadership of education to be devolved to a fully academised system.

The association's interim chief executive is Sir Peter Simpson, retired chief executive of the Brooke Weston Trust, who was responsible for developing a multi-academy trust of four secondary academies, a secondary free school and four primary schools.

"We believe that it is important that all parties recognise the success of academies and the reasons for that success: independence, especially of local authority control and intelligent accountability," he says.

Teacher supply remains an area of concern. "Our members are concerned that teacher supply, particularly in core subjects remains a problem with academies in depressed rural towns reporting particular difficulties in recruiting high calibre teachers," Sir Peter says.

The IAA adds: "The organisation takes the view that with success comes an obligation to support system improvement. It would welcome moves to intensify



Sir Peter Simpson

accountability for collaboration with an emphasis on school to school support. "However, although the IAA recognises the need for accountability it believes that there is a need reduce the burden on academies by rationalising the existing arrangements and, in particular, integrate financial auditing and the evaluation of educational standards."

MANIFESTO POINTS

1. Devolve the leadership of education to a fully academised system
2. Reform academy governance, including making governing bodies smaller and encouraging people with relevant professional expertise to become academy governors
3. Review the inspection and accountability demands placed upon academies, aiming for simplification without diluting accountability
4. Provide educational funding that reflects recent increases in costs and that is maintained in real terms
5. Take affirmative action to remedy the shortage of teachers

TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

To expect a manifesto from the IAA that was not in support of the academies and free schools programme would be like asking a vegan to support carnivores. The call for a fully-academised system will ring positively with the Conservative party, which has already sought to rapidly expand the number of academies in England.

As part of its call for more to be done about teacher recruitment, it does go against the Conservative policy of Teaching School Alliances, questioning how successful they have been. Its call for a fair funding formula echoes that of the ASCL on the opposite page.

MANIFESTO POINTS

- Ensure the national education budget is sufficient, equitable and sustainable, and implement a national fair funding formula
- An incoming government must determine a slim and smart accountability framework and then to leave it in place for at least the term of parliament
- A coherent, adequately resourced and strategically planned approach to initial teacher education. The approach must ensure there are sufficient numbers of high quality graduates entering the profession in every subject and in every region
- An independent College of Teaching, set up through a government endowment fund and led by a peer-elected board, should set teacher standards and have a key role in enhancing teachers' professional learning
- Our education system is good, but it is not yet great. The challenge for government is to create the enabling conditions for a self-improving system. And the challenge for the profession involves a change in mind-set - to step forward and lead the debate

TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

The ASCL notes in its blueprint that it has the support of all three main political parties. Unlike other trade unions it does not appear to attack certain policy decisions of the past five years.

It seems fairly open to work with any political party, and is intent on pushing forward the idea that it is the profession that needs to make the changes, not the government.

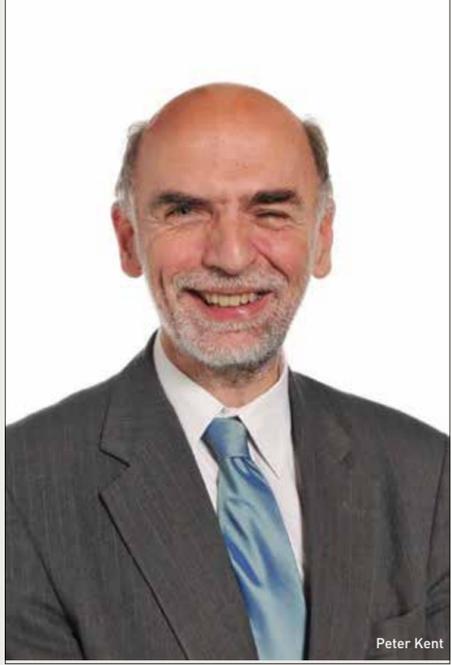
WHAT THE LEADER SAYS

The ASCL says in its blueprint that it wants a "genuinely self-improving system" in which all children and young people achieve.

The trade union also wants those within the profession to take the lead in that improvement.

President Peter Kent says: "All our key priorities, such as the need for sufficient funding to provide a good quality education, and accountability measures that are clear and do not change with the shifting winds of political whim, arise from the over-arching moral purpose behind our blueprint.

"The focus shifts from central direction to 'unleashing greatness' in schools themselves - working collaboratively to improve the quality both of teachers entering the profession and existing teachers, cultivating peer learning within schools and between them, encouraging innovation to discover future leading practices and ultimately ownership of outcomes and the quality of education by the profession. "We believe that it is possible to improve our education system by working together.



Peter Kent

The document proposes a set of actions that the profession can take, that ASCL will take and that government might take. "It is clear to us that deep and sustained reform of our education system will not come from outside: it depends on us - the many, not just the few."