Performance-related pay worsens inequalities in British education

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The Blair government's Green Paper, *Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change*, is an attack on pay and conditions. Labour claimed that by reintroducing the method of paying teachers by results they would be able to attract more applicants into the heavily under-subscribed profession and "modernise" education.

In this, as in other areas, Labour are implementing plans associated with those on the far right of educational theory. This method of determining pay scales was last used in England in the nineteenth century. From 1870 to 1895 government grants to schools and teachers' salaries were determined by the performance of children against national standards. Its reintroduction was a longstanding ambition of previous Conservative governments.

At present teachers can progress up a nine-point pay scale. Increases then depend on extra responsibility. The new system does away with automatic increments based on experience. Instead annual appraisals by the school's head are to be introduced, along with a "performance threshold" which will enable a small number of teachers to enter a higher pay scale. This will be conditional upon assessment and outside verification. In other words, the majority of teachers are to lose their right to annual increments to finance a pay increase for a minority. Even this will be at the cost of longer hours.

Labour's plan for teachers is a policy of divide and rule. The carrot of fast track promotion is also being held out for younger teachers whose appraisal deems that they qualify to move past the threshold. Head teachers have just been awarded a pay rise of between 6.5 percent and 9 percent--double that of their staff--as a sweetener to ensure their co-operation. The proposals will also effectively end collective bargaining, as teachers will be employed on individual contracts.

The Green Paper requires all schools to have in place a "performance management policy" agreed by their respective governing bodies. Subjected to annual appraisal, each teacher will be expected to have a portfolio which contains an analysis of their pupils' achievements, evidence that they are up to date with their own subject, and that they are competent to teach computer skills and have good classroom discipline. They must also show a commitment to their own professional development and be prepared to go on training courses after school hours--paying for them out of their own pockets--if they have passed the performance threshold.

Whilst the teaching unions have been critical of the Green Paper proposals, they have facilitated its introduction by supporting the appraisal of teachers on the proviso that it would be used for professional development.

The measures will only compound the problems that Labour claims to be addressing. Teachers in inner-city areas will largely remain at the end of the pay scale, as lower test results correlate with areas of high unemployment and poverty. The gap in educational provision between children in poorer families and their better off counterparts will also widen. The introduction of the national curriculum and the publication of league tables of test and examination results have already had this result.

Underfunded schools are unable to compensate for the effects of poverty on education achievement. The government had said that it would take socio-economic factors into account by introducing a "value-added" system of measuring results--approximating how much value a school had added from the child's baseline when starting school. This has been dropped, but even this measure illustrated Labour's "cost-effective"

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approach to education. Education Secretary David Blunkett and his department never fail in repeating that it is what "happens in the classroom" that counts. In this way the government can avoid any responsibility for addressing the social and cultural problems that play a major role in every child's development. Labour's classrooms will only exacerbate inequalities, further demoralise teachers and deprive millions of young people of the education that they need.

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