

UK government attacks teachers' pay

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5 January 2013

The betrayal by National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) of the fight to defend pensions has opened the way for the introduction of performance-based pay.

Michael Gove, secretary of state for education in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government, announced the proposals to scrap teachers' existing pay and conditions on December 5, 2012, spearheading a government offensive to decimate the wages of all workers in the public sector. The government is also preparing legislation to outlaw industrial action and to make it easier for heads to dismiss staff.

The changes are to be implemented in September. Previously teachers progressed up a six-point pay scale annually so their pay reflected their experience. Now there will no longer be a prescribed set of points, just a minimum and maximum salary to be decided at the discretion of the head teacher. Many responsibility payments could become temporary and when teachers move schools they may face a pay cut.

Also from next September, the paltry 1 percent public sector pay rise (a pay cut when inflation is factored in) will be at a given schools' discretion, except for teachers at the maximum and minimum.

Performance management and teacher appraisal was first introduced in September 2000. While the unions now express verbal outrage at performance-based pay, they fully cooperated with performance management on the proviso that it enabled the professional development of teachers. The largest teachers' union, the NUT, facilitated the implementation of these changes by preparing a model performance management policy document to be used by schools.

The pay of each teacher will now be determined on an individual basis according to the progress of his or her pupils. Progress is measured in schools by continual testing and assessments and pupils are tracked as they

move up the school according to their grades. This can only lead to teaching to the test.

The implementation of performance-based pay is being driven by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Employed by the government to inspect schools, Ofsted reiterate the government's stated position that performance pay is the key to "raising standards" in school. A recent Ofsted report declared that "the way in which the performance of teachers is managed and linked to their rise up the salary scale ... [will] ensure teachers are held fully to account for whether all pupils in their class are making the best possible progress."

All children, regardless of whether they are Special Educational Needs (SEN) or are learning English as a second language, are expected to progress at a minimum rate, two sub-levels at least per year in primary schools, to achieve the nationally expected target of level 4 in English and Maths at age 11. Teachers' pay is to be linked to this arbitrary target.

The Sutton Trust Education Endowment Foundation has produced a research-based Teaching and Learning Toolkit offering guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. In their study on performance or merit pay, they found its impact on the performance of a class was "closer to zero" and that "approaches which simply assume that incentives will make teachers work harder do not appear to be well supported."

They also found that "Performance pay may lead to a narrower focus on test performance and restrict other aspects of learning."

Rather than being linked to the quality or style of teaching, the performance of pupils as measured by national exams is linked in general to social class, with children in more deprived areas performing worse than their better-off counterparts. A 2006 study by University College London and King's College into the

link between social class and attainment found that how well children do is determined by their social class. Using information from the Department of Education and Skills, the study matched 1 million pupils with their individual postcode and exam scores at 11 to 15 years of age.

The Sutton Trust showed in research they did in 2011 that “parental background remains a much more significant determiner of children’s life chances in the UK than elsewhere.”

A recent study by the Institute for Public Policy and Research think tank concluded that since 2010, the social class divide and its impact on attainment has begun to widen with the rise in child poverty, unemployment and the recession.

The attacks of the government and those of its Labour Party predecessor are wrapped up in Orwellian doublespeak—“raising standards”, “every child matters”, “raising expectations,” etc. Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw has even set up a commission “to look at the cycle of deprivation and closing the gap between the haves and have-nots.” Previously he gained infamy by berating the “too many heads [head teachers] who make excuses [for not achieving government exam targets] in terms of background” and the need to move away from a “no excuses culture”.

The government is so concerned with raising standards that children in Academy schools, introduced under the Labour government, can be taught by practitioners without qualified teaching status! Academy schools receive a similar amount from the government as state schools, but because academies are free from any local authority control they are given extra cash for the services that local councils would have otherwise provided. Academies are not bound by rules and regulations governing the pay and conditions of senior staff. They can set their own pay and conditions for teachers and lengthen the school day.

The aim of the coalition is to make all schools either Academies or so-called Free Schools. The latter have even greater powers over the teaching curriculum, pupil admissions and staff pay and conditions than Academies. To this end, with the help of Ofsted, more and more schools in the state sector are being set up to fail inspections and then forced down the Academy route.

Since the introduction of the new Ofsted arrangements in January last year, schools which are assessed as “satisfactory” are now listed as requiring improvement and have to face all the rigours of schools which were previously deemed failing and put in “special measures.” With 31 percent of all schools assessed as only satisfactory, if they cannot achieve the status of “good” within two years they will be handed over to private consortia. To achieve “good” is dependent on all lessons being assessed as good and all pupils making the government prescribed level of progress.



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