ANDREW MARR:  
Now Labour is gradually revealing some of its ideas for government and in the papers today the Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt, sets out plans for a new cadre of highly skilled master teachers. Education reform has of course been a very important part of the Coalition’s work – new free schools, hundreds more academies, changes to the exam system. Would Labour reverse all of that? Are we talking about small tweaks or about a more radical approach? Tristram Hunt is here. Good morning to you.

TRISTRAM HUNT:  
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:  
So let’s start with your new idea of the moment, which is master teachers. How are these different from well-paid senior teachers around our system at the moment?

TRISTRAM HUNT:  
Well our starting point is this, Andrew: that to succeed as a nation, we need to get a world class teacher in every classroom. And no education system can exceed the
quality of the teaching that goes on in the classroom and we’ve got too many young people leaving primary school not reading at the right level. We’ve got a growing attainment gap between those kids on free school meals and not on free school meals outside of London.

ANDREW MARR:
So how do you get these super teachers?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
So we get these super teachers who are going to focus really on using the best research in the classroom. They’re going to support other teachers in collaboration. It’s going to be based on merit and not time. And it’s about the classroom technique, it’s about behaviour, it’s about management, it’s about getting the best out of …

ANDREW MARR:
So where do you find them and how do you kind of rate them as master teachers?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Great, so they’re all qualified teachers and then what we’re looking at is the Singaporean system. So once you’ve qualified as a teacher, you’ve got three pathways: you can either go into management to go and become a head, become a subject specialist in history or physics or geography or become a master teacher. So it’s about having a career pathway for teachers because at the moment …

ANDREW MARR:
Does it mean extra training for the teachers who become master teachers?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yes, absolutely, it’s going to be extra training. And that has to be …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And new exams and new …
… that has to be revalidated and qualified because at the moment too many great teachers are moving out of the classroom and becoming heads, and we want to keep them in the classroom because that’s where they can make the biggest difference.

ANDREW MARR:
And, crucially, would you pay them more if they were master teachers?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well we’ve now got a flexible system for pay, so heads have the capacity to pay their teachers in differing ways, and we think that any ambitious head would want to have a master teacher on their roll. So there will be flexibility to pay them appropriately.

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) Okay, so we’re talking about maybe only one per school, that kind of number?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Oh yeah, we wouldn’t … I mean this is a difficult qualification to get. And what we’re supporting also, Andrew, as part of our focus on the quality of teaching is a Royal College of Teaching, and so we would want them to be part of the conversation about how you accredit master teacher status.

ANDREW MARR:  
Now at the moment, of course, teachers are very upset about pay and about hours and we’re about to see a strike. I know you’ve said you’re against the strike. Would your message be to teachers today not to strike and to stay in the classroom and teach?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well this is a political failure and I think this is as a result partly of some of the incendiary language …

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) And that, if I may say, is a political answer.
Well it’s part of the incendiary language from the Secretary of State. I want teachers in schools teaching and I want kids in schools learning because we are in a ever more competitive environment. We’re seeing countries – not only Singapore and Shanghai – rising up against us, but countries like Poland where they’re really achieving in maths and literacy. And so we need as many hours in the class as possible. Parents will be getting their reports this week about their kids and they’ll have the percentage of time they’re in.

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* Lots of teachers … yes a lot of teachers are watching this.

TRISTRAM HUNT:

Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:

Is your message to them clearly: on Thursday go to work?

TRISTRAM HUNT:

Well my message is that we have an independent …

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* No it’s not.

TRISTRAM HUNT:

… system of trade unions in civil society. It’s not up to me to tell trade unionists what to do. What I want is teachers in classrooms in a conversation with the Secretary of State, so we get over these kind of hurdles. We didn’t have these kind of strikes …

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* But you won’t tell them to go to work?

TRISTRAM HUNT:

We didn’t have these kind of strikes under a Labour Government. I want all teachers in the schools teaching the young people …
ANDREW MARR:
Alright.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
… but you know we have independent trade unions in this country and that is an important part of civil society.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you think they have got a justified grievance, which is why they’re taking this action?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
What I do think we have is too much bureaucracy in the system, which is taking teachers away from the love of their job, the profession, what they came in for. And it’s a really difficult debate this because, on the one hand, we need data about the performance of young people and that was one of the great successes of our policy in government – the London Challenge – which turned around education in the capital. But if you’re collecting too much data too much of the time, is that getting in the way of what you came into the profession to do, which is teach young people and open minds? And what I want to do, unlike the current Secretary of State, is meet the trade unions, have a conversation about that, so they can do what they enjoy.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Now we have this rather sweet new tradition in politics where ministers and shadow ministers communicate by letter. And Michael Gove has written you a letter this morning saying, asking you, whether you will guarantee the free schools if Labour win the election. Will they be safe under Labour, the free schools that have been created under the Coalition?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
I do think if Michael Gove sort of spent less time sending me letters and more time focusing on standards and teaching in our schools, we’d be in a better place. That said, I’ll answer your question.
ANDREW MARR:
You can save yourself a piece of writing paper by answering him now.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Absolutely. We will not continue with the current government’s free school programme from the Al Madinah Free School in Derby to the Kings Science Academy in Bradford to the Discovery New School in Crawley. We’ve seen a catalogue there of failures, of poor standards, of financial mismanagement. Our focus is on the quality of the teaching in the classroom across all different types of schools. We will keep …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So will you close free schools that are open already?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) No, no, no, we’ll keep the free schools that are open, we’ll keep free schools in the pipeline. But what we want to do is focus new schools on areas of need because what we see at the moment, Andrew …

ANDREW MARR:
So …

TRISTRAM HUNT:
... what we see at the moment is lots of schools with growing numbers of primaries with kids over thirty. So those parents watching today, thinking well why are my kids educated in classes of over thirty, that is because the Government is taking money for new schools in places of need to fund the free school programme and that is a misallocation of resources.

ANDREW MARR:
But if they’re in the pipeline, they will happen under Labour as well …
TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) Yes, yes people are …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … so there will be more free schools under a Labour Government than there are now?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) Well what we want … I mean your opening question was about you know stability and change, and what we think is we actually need a period of stability in the education system because we’ve had too much top down chop and churn from this government – edict after edict, change after change – and actually what we want is to allow heads and teachers to get on with their job. I’m not coming in just to throw everything up in the air again and you know take the kind of narrow partisan decisions. Actually what I’m concerned is the broader outcomes for our young people. But let’s get this into perspective. Free schools educate under 2 per cent of kids. I’m much more focused on the 98 per cent and that’s about the quality of teaching in the classroom.

ANDREW MARR:
Let me ask you one non-teaching question. The big child abuse stories in the papers today. Labour’s called for an inquiry. Why?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
We think we’ve got too many bitty inquiries going on. We think there are broader issues here and what we’re focusing on is having an inquiry led by a child protection expert. Our fear is, whether it’s some of the allegations we’re seeing this morning or some of the historic allegations, there isn’t a cohesive approach to what is a really serious public policy issue. So we want a quality inspection of this.

ANDREW MARR:
Do you agree with Simon Danczuk that there’s a kind of Savile-like tsunami of filth about to hit the House of Commons?
TRISTRAM HUNT:
I think Simon’s done very, very powerful work on this and I think his investigations of Cyril Smith have obviously led him to broader questions. But we also need to be careful about innuendo. We have to take this step by step and not throw out allegations. We saw that in some of the previous concerns about this. So I would, you know, in terms of politicians, in terms of the media, we have to be absolutely ruthless about getting to the truth of this, but we also have to be clear about people’s reputations and take this in a step by step manner.

ANDREW MARR:
Tristram Hunt, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS