• Hunt pledges to increase Sure Start childcare places by 50,000 with no cost to the taxpayer.
• Hunt concedes that nuns can be ‘brilliant’ teachers.
ANDREW MARR:
Now last week we heard a lot about the Conservatives’ plans for education – tough new tests for literacy and numeracy but flat cash in terms of funding for English schools. The amounts spent on each pupil won’t be cut, but it won’t be protected from inflation. Now we’ll hear Labour’s position on that in just a moment, but first its announcement today about Sure Start. The Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt is here to explain. Good morning to you, Tristram.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
So Sure Start, you want to … It was a Labour policy to help kids particularly in disadvantaged areas before school to get the start they need and deserve. It’s been cut by this government and you are going to expand it again, yes?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well the Sure Start Children’s Centres programme was one of the great achievements of the last Labour government. This was about tackling inequality and disadvantaged in the early years to make sure that those young kids from poor communities were able to enter reception and Year 1 school ready. It was about celebrating and developing attachment and parenting and good behaviours amongst kids so that they could succeed because we know that by the age of 7 most of the disadvantage between poor kids and rich kids which will come out is already in place. So what we’re announcing today is 50,000 new childcare places in our Sure Start Children’s Centres by making sure we’re using those existing Sure Start Centres to be opened up to charitable, local, private sector childcare providers, and really bringing public sector and private together because we’ve got a lot of moth-balled facilities. We’ve got these great Sure Start Children’s Centres in our communities not being used effectively and we want to open them up to the public because we’ve got rising demand out there, we’ve got these moth-balled facilities in our communities. Let’s open it up.

ANDREW MARR:
So they need to be opened up, heated, cleaned, staffed, the kids need to be properly treated once they’re there. How much is all this going to cost?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well this is a zero …

ANDREW MARR:
It can’t cost nothing?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
No because what we’re doing is opening this up for those involved in charitable, in local, in private sector childcare facilities. They, they …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So this is a Labour policy that’s entirely going to be driven by charitable people?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
… they provide the resources, they provide the staff. What we’ve got are these public sector facilities which are sitting there not being used, and so we’re saying that childcare centres will have a statutory duty to go out to Barnardo’s, to go out for children, to go out to childcare providers and say, “We’ve got these facilities. We know you’ve got rising demand. Come and use them.” It seems to me crazy that if we’ve got these great facilities in our communities …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So this is a new kind of policy? This is a Labour policy, but entirely to be delivered by people who are not paid for by government? This is an entirely charitable set-up?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well this is …

ANDREW MARR:
All you do is open the doors?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well this is public service reform. This is using public sector facilities alongside charitable, alongside private. You know, we’re going to be entering government in really tough times and I as an incoming Education Secretary have to get value for money, and if we’ve got public sector facilities not being used effectively I want to make sure they are being used because this is about poor kids in disadvantaged communities getting the best start in life and that’s always been a Labour priority.

ANDREW MARR:
So beyond that, you also want what you call “wraparound” childcare for all children in school from 8 in the morning to 6 p.m. Now that must cost money. Where does that money come from?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
This is a really important idea because I think what a lot of …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well all understand why it’s a good idea, if I may say so.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yeah, but let’s understand why. Because a lot of children in disadvantaged communities don’t get the after school clubs, the drama, the sport, they don’t get the breakfast clubs, the great nutrition in the morning. And again we’re saying we’ve got these schools in our communities not being used before school and after school effectively. Let’s open them up to breakfast providers, to charities, to children’s groups, and let’s use public and private together, so that we get the drama in poor communities…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’m not saying it’s a bad idea.
Yeah. No it …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) It’s a great idea. What I’m asking you is where the money comes from?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
The money comes from parents paying for some of these facilities, but we in the public sector say well let’s use these schools we’ve got to open up for them more appropriately. And this isn’t about every single school. It’s about every child having access to this, so it’s schools working together. At the moment we have schools operating as islands – not collaborating, cooperating with one another. And we know that just in terms of results and attainment, schools collaborating and working with one another works much more successfully for the child.

ANDREW MARR:
But you’ll have to put more money in for that?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
No, no, no, no, this is about using existing facilities.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) This is what the Tories call “shaking the magic money tree” and you can see what they …

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) No, no, no, it’s not. It is about getting best value money from our private … best value money from our schools’ estate. And the difference between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party is this: is that we’re not going to be going into this election with a 10 per cent real terms cut to the schools budget because …

ANDREW MARR:
You’re going to be spending more money on schools?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
… we will protect our schools, as we’ve always done through the history of the Labour Party. Because …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So how much more money are you going to be spending on English schools than the Conservatives?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well we’ll be announcing that in the next few days, but what I can say this morning is that right through the history of the Labour Party we’ve always invested in young people, we’ve always invested in education, and Ed Miliband will continue to do that. Not least because of the productivity challenge our economy faces. If we’re going to grow our economy, if we’re going to deliver wealth in this country, we’ve got to have a really successful education and skills system and you don’t deliver that with a 10 per cent cut to schools’ budgets.

ANDREW MARR:
So that’s what the Conservatives are going to do in real terms?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yuh.

ANDREW MARR:
What can you say? That you will not have a 10 per cent cut in real … In real terms, you will be funding schools more generously or less generously?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
As I said, we’ll be setting this out in the next few days.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You have to give us a little warning.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Ed Miliband has said we will do better than David Cameron and I can say we will not
be inflicting a 10 per cent cut to schools’ budgets. That’s just not what Labour parties do in government.

ANDREW MARR:
Going back to the Sure Start announcement.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
If you are not putting any money in yourself, how can you possibly have a realistic target because it depends upon people out there you don’t know, you haven’t spoken to meeting targets that are nothing to do with you when it comes to actual money. If you’re not putting the money in, you can’t promise anything.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well the leading children’s charity for children has said there are about 1,100 Sure Start Children’s Centres which could be used much more effectively, and they’re the eyes and ears on the ground and they’re angry that we’re not using these public facilities more effectively. So we’ve taken a wide consultation on this. We’ve researched it. We think we can do it. Look, we need to get more for less out of our public sector and so we make you know no apology for saying well how can we utilise these most effectively for local, charitable private sector groups. Public and private together, public service reform.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes. Well we’ve talked about the money before. You have had as a party an absolutely miserable week with lots and lots of senior business people queuing up to have a go at you. And one of your own people perhaps put it better than anybody else. He said the trouble is the mood music has been wrong from Labour. You don’t sound like you’re a party enthusiastic about profits, enthusiastic about business and about wealth creation. That is true, isn’t it – you have got the tone wrong if nothing else?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well I’m enormously enthusiastic about businessmen and women making money, about delivering shareholder return, about making profit – not least because that will help to support the Sure Start Children’s Centres and the schools. It makes us a vibrant country.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Do you think your party, therefore, has to say more to win round those business people who are now very, very sceptical about you?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well you know we’ve heard from business people. We’ve got five million great businesses working really hard across Great Britain – making money, as I say – and Labour’s on their side. To go back to this earlier point - what is the problem our economy faces – it’s a productivity challenge, and that means the state has to play its role alongside business. What is the challenge for our business as well? It’s markets and only the Labour Party is committed to ensuring that we’ve got a successful UK working in Europe, delivering those markets for modern British business. So we are a furiously, passionately, aggressively pro-business party.

ANDREW MARR:
Wow! Okay that’s clear enough. Let me take you to nuns then. You had a big argument on Question Time with Cristina Odone about nuns and really about whether all teachers should go through teacher training college first. I suspect the real fear of a lot of people in Christian communities, and as it were on the right, is that teacher training colleges are the place where secular, liberal, left wing ideologies are most promulgated and are then pushed through the education system onto children, and they have a point about that. Are you completely happy about the atmosphere in teacher training colleges at the moment?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well we have a challenge in terms of how we get the best out of our schools system and no education system can exceed the quality of its teachers, so having a really effective initial teacher training process is really, really important. I don’t accept that universities and teacher education institutions are hotbeds of sort of secular Marxism.
Actually I think they’re doing a really effective job trying to get passionate young people into the classroom, give them the skills to deliver subject knowledge and stages of learning. So I don’t accept this sort of culture war idea.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Do you agree … do you agree therefore that lots of people who haven’t been in teacher training colleges but are currently teaching, including nuns, can be very, very good teachers?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
I’m hugely in favour of people working in education, but as an incoming …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s not an answer.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) No, no, but let me answer. As an incoming Education Secretary, what am I concerned with? I’m concerned with all across our state school system having the best qualified people going into it and then year on year delivering high quality teaching. So what I want to see is yes qualified teachers in our classrooms, and I think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Including nuns?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
… and I think parents will be shocked to know that we see more and more unqualified teachers in our classroom. But then to make sure we’ve got the continuing professional development with them to get better year on year on year.

ANDREW MARR:
Can an unqualified nun be a good teacher?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Well we’re …
ANDREW MARR:
Yes or no?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
... we’re not investigating ...

ANDREW MARR:
Yes or no?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
... independent Catholic schools. Look I said on Friday if I had offended nuns in any way, that certainly wasn’t my intention. My point was this – that we need a highly ...

ANDREW MARR
(over) So can an unqualified nun be a good teacher?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) … we need a highly effective, qualified teacher cohort in our schools …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay it’s a very straightforward question, Tristram Hunt: can an unqualified nun be a good teacher?

TRISTRAM HUNT:
My point is this: that we want our teachers more and more qualified and effective in the state education system. I’m sure there are brilliant teachers who are nuns who are doing fantastic jobs, but I as an incoming Education Sec…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) We’ve got that, okay.

TRISTRAM HUNT:
(over) … I as an incoming Education Secretary have to think about the entirety of our
schools across the state system.

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

TRISTRAM HUNT:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS