

Michael Gove's speech in full

"I have a fantastic job.

Every few days I get to visit places which run on undiluted optimism.

I get to spend time in this country's best state schools - and it just lifts the soul like nothing else.

Seeing young lives being transformed by great teaching makes you appreciate that there are people who can change the world.

And we've just been hearing from one of them.

Sir Michael Wilshaw, the head of Mossbourne Academy.

I can't tell you how much I admire this man.

When he arrived at Mossbourne he inherited what was officially the worst school in England.

Now it's one of the best.

It's bang next door to one of Hackney's most deprived estates.

It has more than its fair share of Hackney's poorest children - pupils on free school meals, pupils with special educational needs, pupils who come from homes where English just isn't spoken.

But in just a few short years Sir Michael has ensured that school now has eighty-five per cent of students getting top marks at GCSE - way above the national average - and many are now on course for higher education.

A generation of children born into poverty now destined for the best universities.

It's been an overused word recently - but Sir Michael is a real hero.

And if you want to know what Conservative education policy is in a nutshell its taking what has made Sir Michael's school excellent and spreading it to every school.

Because what Sir Michael does is deliver what every sensible parent knows is needed in our schools.

He insists on a proper uniform - with blazer and tie - respect for authority, clear sanctions for troublemakers and no excuses for bad behaviour.

He sets classes by ability - so the brightest can be stretched and the weakest given special support.

He teaches traditional subjects in a rigorous way and when the bureaucrats try to insert the latest fashionable nonsense into the curriculum he tells them where to get off.

There are fantastic extra-curricular activities, proper competitive sports and an amazing team of teachers - who work into the evenings and on Saturdays to give their pupils the best possible chance in life.

Why isn't every state school like that?

It's my job to make sure they are.

So where do we start?

Well Sir Michael would tell you - with discipline.

Unless you have good discipline then teachers cannot teach and children cannot learn.

And we know that behaviour in many of our schools at the moment just isn't good enough.

More than 300,000 children are suspended from school every year for bad behaviour.

Over 300 children are suspended from school every day for assault.

A quarter of teachers have been physically attacked by students.

We have got to change the system - so we protect teachers not troublemakers.

And we've got to be on the side of the children who want to learn, by dealing firmly with those who won't behave.

Which is why a Conservative Government will act.

We'll give teachers effective power to confiscate banned items and restrain violent pupils.

We will compel the parents of troublemakers to take responsibility for their children.

And we will change the law so that when a head teacher expels a violent pupil- that pupil cannot plead that his human rights have been violated and then stick two fingers up to authority.

We cannot have a system where a student who has pulled a knife on a teacher can swagger back into the school which tried to exclude him because bureaucrats say so.

- under a Conservative Government that will end.

Because we know that no school can succeed unless the head is in control - captain of their ship.

And it's by solving the problems we have with discipline that we can really start to improve standards.

And they desperately need improving.

Over the last ten years we have been falling behind as a nation.

We have dropped from fourth in the world for science standards to fourteenth.

From seventh in the world for literacy to seventeenth.

And from eighth in the world for mathematics to twenty-fourth.

And what makes this decline worse – at once more tragic and more costly – is the widening gap between the achievement of the richest and the poorest.

This year nearly a quarter of a million children left primary school unable to read, write and add up properly – and they were overwhelmingly children from poorer families.

This year more than half the children leaving comprehensives failed to get the basic requirement of five decent GCSE passes – and they were overwhelmingly children from poorer families.

This year there were hundreds of schools which entered no children for either A level history, or geography, or physics, or chemistry or biology – and the children in those schools were from poorer families.

The fate of these children haunts me for very personal reasons.

I know how the right education can give children - whatever their background - amazing opportunities.

I was adopted as a child - given a second chance - and then - thanks to wonderful parents who believed in the transforming power of education - I was given the opportunity to choose my own destiny.

It's because I was given a second chance - because I know that where you were born should never determine who you become - that I am so passionate about improving our education system.

And it is why I am a Conservative.

Because it is this party which has always been on the side of extending opportunity, advancing social mobility, liberating individuals from poverty - and it is that crusade which will define the next Conservative Government.

Because we will deal with this problem at its heart...

We will tackle head on the defeatism, the political correctness and the entrenched culture of dumbing down that is at the heart of our educational establishment.

For far too long out of touch bureaucrats have imposed faddy ideologies on our schools which ignore the evidence of what really works in education.

Teachers have been deprived of professional freedom, denied the chance to inspire children with a love of learning and dragooned into delivering what the bureaucrats decree.

We know that the countries with the very best education systems are those with the best teachers - and we know that the only way we can deliver real improvements in

education is by strengthening the role of great teachers - and diminishing the power of the bureaucrats.

So we will drastically reduce the intrusive regulation which holds back good teachers - and ensure there are many more talented people who choose to become teachers.

We'll expand Teach First - which has helped recruit the highest performing graduates into teaching.

We'll develop a Troops to Teachers programme - to get professionals in the army who know how to train young men and women into the classroom where they can provide not just discipline - but inspiration and leadership.

And we'll ensure that experts in every field - especially mathematicians, scientists, technicians and engineers - can make a swift transition into teaching so our children have access to the very, very best science education -

Nothing matters more to our future economic prosperity than a flourishing science base.

But in no area has the curriculum been more debased by the bureaucrats than in science.

Over the last few years there has been a remorseless retreat from rigour in the exams we set our children.

Let me read you some of the questions we ask our sixteen year olds.

In GCSE science we ask students if nurses leave the room during X-ray sessions in hospital for health reasons

or because their mobile phone might melt

or they might get a tan.

We ask students which is a better argument for nuclear power - creating jobs or creating toxic waste.

We ask students which is healthier - a battered sausage or grilled fish.

These aren't rigorous tests of scientific knowledge - they're terrifying evidence of how our educational establishment has presided over a comprehensive decline in examination standards.

What should we do with people who think that this country can become a scientific leader by asking about sausages in batter? They've just got to go.

And under a Conservative Government the people who've been responsible for dumbing down our examination system will go.

The time is long overdue for us to put rigour at the heart of the curriculum.

And there are few areas of knowledge where that matters more than history.

There is no better way of building a modern, inclusive, patriotism than by teaching all British citizens to take pride in this country's historic achievements.

Which is why the next Conservative Government will ensure the curriculum teaches the proper narrative of British History - so that every Briton can take pride in this nation.

If the only areas where the education establishment had failed were on science and history then that would be bad enough.

But the failure goes deeper. And starts earlier.

The biggest failure of our education system is the failure to teach children the most important skill of all - the ability to read.

Every year more than 100,000 children - one in five - leave primary school unable to read properly.

Two thirds of working class boys at the age of fourteen have a reading age of seven or below.

One in five - after going through the school system - do not have the language skills to be able to find a plumber under P in the Yellow Pages.

Those children who cannot read are imprisoned in ignorance all their lives.

They are, overwhelmingly, likely to be the difficult and disruptive pupils in class - covering up their inability to follow what's going on by trying to show how tough and hard they are.

And they are, overwhelmingly, likely to be the truants, the recruits for street gangs, the children who have given up on hope and become trapped in defiance

Nothing is more important than saving these young lives. That is why we will ensure in every primary school there is a renewed and relentless focus on getting every child to read quickly and fluently. We will train a new generation of primary teachers in the skills they need. And we will have a simple reading test for children after two years at primary school to make sure they are reading fluently.

Wanting to teach children to read properly isn't some sort of antique prejudice - it's an absolute necessity in a civilized society and I won't rest until we have eliminated illiteracy in modern Britain.

The failure to teach millions to read is the greatest of betrayals. But I'll be taking on the education establishment because they've done more than just squander talent. They've also squandered money.

Your money.

On an epic scale.

The extent of waste in the budgets of educational bureaucracies is a genuine scandal.

The body responsible for writing the curriculum - the QDCA - spends more than one hundred million pounds every year -

and after hiring an army of consultants, squadrons of advisers and regiments of bureaucrats they still wrote a syllabus for the Second World War without any place for Winston Churchill.

Never in the field of public expenditure has so much been spent by so many to distort World War Two.

We need to take education out of the hands of these unaccountable quangocrats and make sure - at a time of austerity - that we use every penny we can to keep teachers in the classroom.

This is your money.

Which should be spent on your children.

And under a Conservative Government it will be.

We will ensure that the quangos are cut down to size, waste is cut out of the system and bureaucracies are cut to the bone...

And when it comes to making money go further our reforms will go deeper.

We will give parents control over the money which is spent on their children's education. Parents will be able to take the five thousand pounds the state spends on their children to the school of their choice. And we will give the parents of poorer children more money.

Because nobody cares more about a child's education than their parents. And no parents need our help more than the poorest.

I want to see a radical shift of power in education -

Instead of a system run from the centre which has given us the drift towards bigger and bigger schools, the decline in standards of behaviour, the devaluation of exams and the dumbing-down of the curriculum we will have a shift in power which will ensure the good sense of millions of parents determines our children's future.

The first thing we will do is apply the policies which have worked so well in Sweden, in America and Canada in bringing great schools to communities which at the moment have none.

We will change the laws - on planning, on funding, on staffing - to make it easier for new schools to be created in your neighbourhood, so you can demand the precise, personalised, education your children need

Just imagine it - within walking distance of your front door.

A small school - where the headteacher knows every child's name

with smaller class sizes - and personal support for your child.

With higher standards and tougher discipline

The money currently wasted on red tape and management consultants instead invested in books and teachers.

This is step one in a revolution which will see more and more of our schools run by professionals - who are accountable to parents not central or local bureaucracy.

The next step is putting the machinery in place to improve existing schools now.

We know that the fastest improving state schools in our country - like Mossbourne are academies.

Because they're outside local bureaucratic control they have the freedom to pay good teachers more, to tailor teaching to every child and to ignore government red tape.

So we will dramatically accelerate the number of academies - we have already said that the very best schools in our country should be able to become academies so they can partner under-performing schools and help them improve.

But the scale of the problems we face as a nation mean that we have to go further, faster, sooner...

So a Conservative Government would allow any school that is ready to the chance to become a new academy.

Every state school could have the chance to free itself from bureaucratic control - and get the extra money, freedom and flexibility which schools like Mossbourne have used to dramatically lift standards.

Let me be clear - that means a fundamental change in the role of local authorities - instead of telling parents who're unhappy with local schools to like it or lump it, local bureaucrats will be on notice to justify their position, their power and their performance. Because we need money where it makes a difference - not on a bureaucrat's desk but in the classroom.

And because we want to ensure that the benefits of academy status are delivered most quickly where they're most needed a Conservative Government will act on day one to help those children who've been let down most comprehensively.

We will create new technical schools in our major cities to ensure children who need it get the sort of hands-on, practical, vocational education you need in the world of work. These schools will be in the vanguard of providing what our economy desperately needs now - thousands more proper, real-world, apprenticeships.

And we won't stop there.

We will - in our first hundred days - identify the very worst schools - the sink schools which have desperately failed their children - and put them in rapidly into the hands of heads with a proven track record of success.

We will remove the managements which have failed

and replace them with people who know how to turn round schools

people like Sir Michael Wilshaw

heads who can impose discipline

improve teaching

and rescue the children this system has betrayed.

I will not allow another generation of our poorest children to have their future blighted by failing schools.

Now, I'm going into this with my eyes open.

I understand the scale of this ambition.

I know the changes we need to make will not come smoothly or easily.

There will be problems.

It will be hard, fraught, difficult.

We will be attacked by those who've been complicit in decades of failure who see their power, their privileges and their reputations under assault.

But, we face a stark choice in education today

do nothing - and watch as we fall further behind other nations

do nothing - and watch as the gap between those who have and those who have not widens inexorably

- do nothing - and allow the vicious, violent minority to dominate the playground, and the streets.

Well, I simply refuse to stand on the sidelines and allow that to happen

Because we cannot afford to fail in our mission to improve state education.

We know the problems we face in education are a microcosm of the problems we face in all of British society

Over-bureaucratic, over-regulated, over-run by political correctness.

Under-performing, under-achieving, under the control of the wrong people.

It has got to change.

The whole point of politics is to fight for change -

This party is at its best when it's on the side of change.

This country has never been more in need of change.

So let us work, and fight together, and never give in until we have delivered the change this country deserves."