

# SSAT Manifesto 2017: 25 things we'd like to see in a new government

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May 2017

## About SSAT

SSAT is the Schools, Students and Teachers network. As a membership organisation we work directly with thousands of school leaders and teachers. Founded originally in 1987, we have been at the forefront of educational innovation for 30 years, and continue to support schools through collaborative membership and our rigorous school improvement and CPD programmes. We believe in a truly school-led system, supported by strong local and national government and meaningful collaborations. At the heart of our belief is that education should benefit every young person in the country.

## About this manifesto

Whichever party is elected in June 2017, the new government will have an opportunity to address many of the concerns raised by our member schools about the educational landscape. This manifesto is published alongside *Schools at the heart of educational reform*, a pamphlet exploring some of these issues in more detail and the implications for school leaders.

The following 25 manifesto points are by no means exhaustive, but are designed to be accessible and self-explanatory. These have been informed by our conversation with members, but they do not reflect the views of any one SSAT member, rather the views of SSAT as an independent organisation.

***Please join the debate and ensure education is a key part of the election rhetoric by tweeting us on @ssat.***

## 25 things we'd like to see in a new government

### Curriculum and assessment

The focus of curriculum at all key stages should remain breadth, depth and balance – with schools publishing their curriculum vision and intent. Assessment should be closely linked to curriculum and pedagogy, and should be driven by the needs of all learners. Curriculum should promote wellbeing and good life experiences.

1. All schools and academies should be required to teach both PSHE and sex and relationships education from KS1-KS5.
2. The government should promote a mental health programme, working cross-sector to ensure all young people enjoy good mental health and have ready access to support when needed.
3. The government should launch a national careers strategy, ensuring all students and businesses have access to high-quality, trained careers specialists who can facilitate between schools and local industries.
4. The DfE should promote a National Baccalaureate based on core learning, a personal project, and a personal development programme.
5. The threshold measure of % of students achieving a standard / strong pass in English and maths ('Basics') should be abolished.
6. The threshold measure of % of students achieving a strong pass in the Ebacc should be abolished. There should not be a national or school-level target for students entered for the Ebacc.
7. The number and intensity of primary assessments should be reduced to ease the current pressure on schools and students.

### Quality teaching and leadership

The single biggest factor in a child's education is the teacher. While structures and systems are undoubtedly important, policy must ensure that every young person has access to high quality teaching and learning. The conditions for good teaching and learning are created by good school leaders, who develop their staff and ensure that they maintain teaching and learning at the core of their decision making.

8. The DfE should work with MATs and LAs on a new strategy to recruit the best teachers and school leaders in the areas most needed, while raising the status of teaching as a graduate profession.
9. The DfE must have a continual focus on high quality teaching and leadership; and support existing and new innovations to support this.
10. There should be new statutory guidance for schools and academies, requiring schools to ring fence budgets for CPD and staff training, and ensuring a relentless drive to develop teacher quality. Schools should report annually on the effectiveness of their CPD in relation to individual development and student outcomes.
11. The DfE should continue working on a teacher vacancy website to reduce the costs associated with teacher recruitment.
12. There should be greater regulation of teacher supply agencies, with a cap on the amount that can be charged to schools for supply staff.

### Admissions

With the ad hoc growth of the academy system and recent changes to admissions rules, school admissions policies are inconsistent and do not always promote social justice or mobility. Plans to extend selection at secondary level will not meet the desired aim of increased social mobility. In order to reduce educational inequality, the government should mandate changes to local admissions.

13. All schools and academies should be required to prioritise pupil premium students in their admissions policies.
14. The government should abandon plans to open new selective schools, ensuring instead a good school place for every child in the system.

### Funding

Schools have seen real-term cuts to their budgets over the last few years, despite the last government's commitment to protect school funding. Many school leaders report being at breaking point, which has led to many threats of strike action or school closures. It is estimated that £3bn will be lost in real terms across the sector, and that individual schools will see 8%-12% reductions to

their budgets by 2021. However, school funding grew rapidly in the 2000s and was largely protected between 2010-2015, when cuts to other public sectors were harsh. School funding does need to be increased, as well as distributed more fairly between areas; any manifesto promise to increase funds should be clearly budgeted and accounted for.

15. The new government should be transparent about the real-term per-pupil funding cuts. It should bring proposals before parliament to either: a) freeze school budgets in real terms between 2017 and 2022, or b) increase school budgets to match 2010 real-term funding.
16. MATs should receive all of their academies' funding centrally and should decide how to distribute it based on need, unlike the current model of 'top-slicing'. They should justify their allocations each year.

### Accountability

It is important that schools are held to account on their outcomes and use of public money, but this must be done in an intelligent way that promotes the wellbeing of all young people, staff and other stakeholders.

17. Ofsted should consult on removing the 'outstanding' outcome.
18. Ofsted should consult on changing the judgement on 'teaching, learning and assessment' to one on 'curriculum and assessment' which would focus on the breadth, depth and balance of schools' curricula and the reliability and validity of schools' assessment systems.
19. Ofsted should continue its recent good work at dispelling myths about inspection, and further look at how to lower the stakes of inspection and curb negative behaviours.

### Structures and systems

The school-led system has not been fully realised or achieved. The growth of academies and the development of MATs has been ad hoc and unstrategic in some cases, leading to discrepancies and some bad practice in the system. The government needs to establish clear lines of accountability and clear systems, at both national and

local levels. We need to learn from the best MATs, academies and schools in order to embed a plurality of good practice across the system.

20. The DfE should commission an independent review of the role of regional school commissioners and headteacher boards – assessing the extent to which the roles are clearly defined, and decisions are transparent and locally accountable.
21. The government should bring about legislation to let the best local authorities open new free schools, sponsor existing academies and open multi-academy trusts.
22. The DfE should release clearer statutory guidance on the role, number and crossover of MAT members and trustees, and give all MATs a grace period in which to change their articles of associations to comply.
23. Schools should be encouraged and incentivised to come together in meaningful collaborations across local areas and MATs to raise the outcomes for all young people in England.

### Policy announcements

In line with expectations of schools' practices, government policy should be evidence-based and should always seek to support everyone in the system: trustees and governors, academy and school leaders, teachers, all young people, and parents.

24. Any government white paper on education should include an impact report looking at the impact of proposed policies on all young people, including vulnerable groups such as those qualifying for pupil premium, looked after, low attainers, and SEND.
25. The DfE should reaffirm its commitment to make no policy announcements which affect school curriculum, assessment or outcome measures midway through a course; nor to make changes to the Ofsted framework or accountability regime midway through the school year. It should publish consultations, and their outcomes, on time.