

# Blair bets £12 billion on schools: Labour stakes future on education revolution [GB] <sup>[1]</sup>

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Every secondary school in England and Wales is to get a £50,000 increase in its budget as Tony Blair gambles the future reputation of his Government on reforming Britain's comprehensives.

A record increase in government spending for the Department for Education will be announced tomorrow by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. This will take the education budget to £12.5 billion over the next three years.

The money equals a 6 per cent increase in the schools and university budget until 2006, by which time Britain will be spending 5.6 per cent of its national income on education, higher than in the United States and more than the European Union average.

Each school now has an average grant of about £100,000. The new money represents a 50 per cent increase over the three years.

Blair has described tomorrow's announcement as a 'defining moment' for the Government.

'If we don't get education right, then all our work on crime and health and the economy will be undermined,' said one senior No 10 figure. Estelle Morris, the Education Secretary, will announce a raft of new policies on Tuesday to try to turn around the struggling education system. Failing comprehensive schools will be told to change and more money will be directed at successful schools.

'Reform has to work. We have to change the whole attitude of secondary education,' said another official.

Some schools will be ordered to come together in 'federations' run by one super-head whose salary will approach £100,000.

New policies to tackle bad behaviour and truancy will be announced, as will more money to hire classroom assistants to take the pressure off teachers.

Alan Milburn, the Health Secretary, said last night: 'Despite my job and my determination to play my part in rebuilding the NHS, if I was asked to answer what will make the biggest difference for our country in the long term, I would have to reply: education. And that's why tomorrow's spending review needs to make clear that for the Government, education is the number one priority.'

Brown will announce an extra £1bn for debt relief and anti-poverty measures for the developing world. Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, has won a fierce battle with the Foreign Office to get all the money channelled through her department.

The Chancellor's spending review will be one of the biggest events of this Government. He will reveal how he will divide a total of £1.5 trillion of government spending over the next three years.

By the last year of the review, 2005-06, government spending will reach £511bn, another record. If the British public sector were a separate economy, it would be in the top ten of world economies, bigger than Spain or Canada.

Around one fiftieth - or 2 per cent - of the globe's annual income will be allocated for spending by the Chancellor tomorrow. This is more than the annual gross domestic product of the whole of Africa.

Hundreds of performance targets will be revealed, with all departments adhering to a Public Service Agreement (PSA) with the Treasury.

Every three months reports on the PSAs will be published so that the public can judge whether the money is being spent wisely. New 'super-regulators' will be part of the package, and bodies will be set up to control spending.

The Chancellor is also expected to unveil a multi-million pound boost for working mothers, with a new network of children's centres, combining childcare and help such as health advice from babyhood to the early teenage years. Many will be linked to school sites, with an expansion in after- and before-school clubs for older children whose parents work longer hours than the typical school day. These are designed to help women escape from the trap of part-time work for low pay. In the long run the centres, likely to be opened first in disadvantaged areas, could be linked to Brown's drive to get lone parents back into work, with free places dependent on getting jobs or training.

The money will help to calm fears that the Government's childcare strategy, considered vital to appeal to women voters, has run out of steam. It should bring together strands of the strategy in 'one-stop shops' for working mothers.

The childcare shortage was highlighted last week in a survey by Kids' Clubs Network, which found there are summer holiday places in out-of-school clubs for only 6 per cent of Britain's children. More than a quarter of parents surveyed recently said they would have to take the entire six weeks of school summer holidays off work to look after their children.

**Region:** Europe <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** demand <sup>[3]</sup>

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