

The Gove Files:

How the Liberal Democrats Improved Education

Things we stopped Michael Gove from doing

1. Profit-making free schools
2. Bringing back the old O-level and CSE divide
3. Cutting new nursery buildings
4. Rewriting history in the national curriculum
5. Axing climate change from national curriculum
6. Early Years Ratio Changes
7. Axing speaking and listening and human rights from the national curriculum
8. Politicising Ofsted

Things we did despite Michael Gove

1. A £2.5bn Pupil Premium
2. Universal Free School Meals for infants
3. Duty for schools to provide careers advice

Things Michael Gove did stop against our will

1. Mandatory PSHE, including sex education
2. Nutritional standards in schools
3. More local accountability & support for schools
4. Ofsted inspecting chains of academies

Things we tried to stop and would reverse

1. Free schools in places where the new schools are not needed
2. Free schools not requiring qualified teachers
3. Free schools not needing planning permission



As a party that believes fundamentally in spreading opportunity to everyone, no matter what your background, Liberal Democrats in government have prioritised education.

We have successfully fought to raise standards by protecting school budgets, to expand early years education and to introduce a pupil premium to get more money to the children who need extra help.

But we have also spent much of the last five years engaged in a behind-the-scenes battle over education with Michael Gove and the Conservatives' ideological agenda.

Where Michael Gove agreed with our plans for education we worked together successfully. We reformed league tables so schools have to focus on all pupils; set more challenging targets in English and maths at primary school and slimmed down the national curriculum. Once Gove abandoned plans to bring back the O-Level, we worked together to reform GCSEs.

But all-too-often Michael Gove and the Conservatives have put their own ideology ahead of good schooling and, while pushing our own priorities, we have also had to moderate the worst excesses of the Conservatives. This document sets out some of the key events in that battle.

However, the fight is far from over.

Conservative scorched earth plans for much deeper cuts than necessary in the next parliament mean that funding for nurseries, schools and colleges could be slashed by a quarter by 2020.

The Liberal Democrats protected schools funding in this Government and plan to go further in the next, protecting funding from nursery to 19. Only with the Liberal Democrats in Government will we finish the job of balancing the books but do so fairly, and ensure that children and young people have every opportunity to reach their potential.

WHAT LIB DEMS STOPPED

1. Profit-making free schools

Nick Clegg defeats bid by Michael Gove to let free schools make profits

Deputy prime minister trumpets Lib Dem success in ensuring education reforms do not just serve 'privileged few'

Observer, 3 September 2011

What Gove wanted:

In May 2010, soon after becoming Education Secretary, Gove said he had “no ideological objection” to businesses running free schools for profit. He was keeping an “open mind” on the idea as late as 2012, while accepting “there are some of my colleagues in the coalition who are very sceptical”.

How we stopped it:

Pressure from the Liberal Democrats made Gove to back down in three key areas on free schools, which Nick Clegg announced ahead of the Liberal Democrat autumn conference. Alongside ruling out schools making a profit, Nick also persuaded Gove to amend the admissions code to allow free schools to give priority to children on free school meals; and to prioritise free schools in deprived areas or areas in need of more places.

2. Bringing back the old O-level & CSE divide

GCSEs will NOT be axed as Gove admits his radical exam reforms were 'a bridge too far'

- Education Secretary Michael Gove will outline radical overhaul of GCSEs
- Had planned to rename the exams and introduce single exam boards
- But Gove's plans were scuppered when Lib Dems expressed opposition

Daily Mail, 6 February 2013

What Gove wanted:

In June 2012 a Gove source decided to brief the Daily Mail on plans to abolish GCSEs and re-introduce O-levels and the equivalent of CSEs before alerting us or his Conservative colleagues. He planned on introducing the new exams from September 2014. He wanted “less academic” pupils to sit a different, “more straightforward” exam similar to the old CSE.

How we stopped it:

As soon as we heard Gove's plans we made clear we were “very, very hostile” to any return to a two-tier system. Within a day Nick Clegg said he would veto the plans if they ever materialised officially. Within nine months Gove had dropped his plans, acknowledging that without Liberal Democrat support he would not be able to push them through. Instead, we have reformed GCSEs to make them more rigorous – but remaining universal qualifications within reach of all children.

3. Cutting new nursery buildings

Lib Dem conference: Clegg pledges £100m for childcare

By Justin Parkinson
Political reporter, BBC News, in Brighton

BBC, 25 September 2012

What Gove wanted:

The coalition had pledged to introduce the Liberal Democrat policy to give two-year-olds from the poorest 20% of families 15-hours of free childcare a week – first promised in November 2010. However, Gove did not want to accept official advice that new facilities would be needed in areas where there was a shortage of childcare places.

How we stopped it:

At Lib Dem autumn conference in 2012 Nick Clegg announced he had secured £100m of capital funding to build the necessary facilities. The funding, the equivalent of building an extra 200 primary schools, was given to local authorities to help create extra nursery space. Nick Clegg said the funding would mean a “revolution in early education”.

4. Rewriting history in the national curriculum

Michael Gove redrafts new history curriculum after outcry

More emphasis given to world history and drastic reduction in scope of primary curriculum under revised proposals

The Guardian, 21 June 2013

What Gove wanted:

In January 2013 Gove said he wanted to personally rewrite the history curriculum, expunging history outside Britain and adding pet subjects like Margaret Thatcher and out-dated historical terms such as the heptarchy. In May that year the historian Simon Schama described Gove’s desired changes as “insulting and offensive” and “pedantic and utopian”.

How we stopped it:

Within days of Gove’s initial announcement Nick Clegg said Gove’s changes “simply will not happen”. In the end, Gove bowed to the inevitable. The new curriculum could not be introduced until Nick Clegg had approved it, a point Gove acknowledged in June 2013 when he backtracked and made a “major rewrite” to take account of the many objections from schools and historians.

5. Axing climate change from the national curriculum

Michael Gove abandons plans to drop climate change from curriculum

Climate change will stay on geography syllabus after lobbying from energy secretary Ed Davey

The Guardian, 5 July 2013

What Gove wanted:

In March 2013 Gove announced he would cut learning about climate change from the national curriculum for children under 14. This went against advice from scientists – and common sense.

How we stopped it:

Liberal Democrat Climate Change Secretary Ed Davey “waged a sustained battle in Whitehall to ensure the topic’s retention,” the Guardian noted in July that year. Liberal Democrats ensured the new national curriculum, published that summer, included a specific reference to changes in weather and the climate from the ice age to the present.

6. Early years ratio changes

Nursery ratio changes being scrapped, Nick Clegg says

By Angela Harrison
Education correspondent, BBC News

BBC, 6 June 2013

What Gove wanted:

In autumn 2013 Gove announced he wanted to change the ratio to allow child-minders to be able to look after more children at the same time, lowering the amount of supervision and support each child could be given. Experts in early years claimed the plans would threaten child learning and safety, with no impact on childcare costs.

How we stopped it:

Gove’s plans went out to consultation, where they received overwhelming criticism. In June 2013 Nick Clegg announced that Gove had been overruled and that the plans would not go ahead. “I cannot ask parents to accept such a controversial change with no real guarantee it will save them money – in fact it could cost them more,” the DPM said.

7. Axing speaking and listening and human rights from the national curriculum

Don't scrap citizenship lessons, teachers plead

Curriculum review, launched today by Michael Gove, could spell end to compulsory citizenship classes

The Guardian, 20 January 2011

What Gove wanted:

In January 2011 Gove announced a curriculum review and suggested that classes in citizenship would no longer be compulsory. Gove said the curriculum “must not cover every conceivable area of human knowledge or endeavour and should not become a vehicle for imposing passing political fads.” Initial drafts of the English curriculum also excluded teaching in speaking and listening, which experts and businesses agree are essential skills.

How we stopped it:

Liberal Democrats were able to ensure in July 2013 that human rights and financial education were also added to the Citizenship curriculum. We would not sign off the English curriculum until calls for speaking and listening had also been incorporated. In the future, Liberal Democrats will ensure that independent subject experts lead reviews of the national curriculum, not politicians.

8. Politicising Ofsted

Angry Lib Dems accuse Michael Gove of bid to politicise education

Schools minister David Laws attacks boss after removal of Labour's Sally Morgan as chair of schools inspectorate Ofsted

The Guardian, 1 February 2014

What Gove wanted:

In January 2014 Gove sacked the chairwoman of Ofsted, Sally Morgan, despite her being widely considered to be an effective and strong leader whom, Gove himself said, had made a “tremendous contribution” in her three years in charge. Instead, it became clear, he wanted a Tory to run Ofsted.

How we stopped it:

Gove was immediately accused by David Laws of making a “blatant” attempt to politicise Ofsted, sacking Morgan because she was a Labour peer. We said we would do everything in our power to block actions we believed would jeopardise its independence. While we weren't able to restore Sally Morgan to post, Liberal Democrats did ensure there was an independent process for recruiting her replacement. This meant that Gove favourites, including Tory donor Theodore Agnew, didn't take up the reins.

THINGS WE DID DESPITE MICHAEL GOVE

1. A £2.5bn Pupil Premium

Nick Clegg claims £5bn pupil premium is victory for Lib Dems

The Guardian, 15 October 2010

What we achieved:

We knew introducing a £2.5bn-per-year Pupil Premium to give pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds the best start in life was important; so important that we put it on the front page of the Liberal Democrat 2010 manifesto.

How Gove failed to match us:

In 2010 the Conservatives also called for a pupil premium, burying it away in one sentence on page 53 of their manifesto – but failed to allocate a penny of funding. Analysis from CentreForum before the election said that Gove would fund the Pupil Premium from within the existing education budget. Nick Clegg made fully-funding the Pupil Premium a red-line in coalition negotiations, and the Coalition Agreement committed to scaling Pupil Premium up to £2.5bn a year, exactly as the Liberal Democrats had called for.

2. Universal Free School Meals for infants

Michael Gove aide accused of 'trying to poison' free school meals plan

Evening Standard, 16 May 2014

What we achieved:

In September 2013 the Conservatives demanded millions to spend on a pet project: a marriage tax break. In return we ensured the same amount be spent on a scheme proven in pilots to aid education attainment, boost social mobility, ensure children eat more healthy food and help families with the cost of living: universal free school meals. These were rolled out to all infants in September 2014 – and have been a remarkable success with an additional 1.3m children now receiving a free, healthy lunch.

How Gove tried to stop it:

Gove's team hated this plan from the start and he attempted to undermine it by refusing to support legislation and also refusing to support extra kitchen capital. In May 2014 leaked confidential government communications laid bare how Gove found the plans "wholly unacceptable". The leaks were assumed to have come from Gove's former special adviser Dominic Cummings, who was described by restaurateur John Vincent as trying to "poison" the plans for free meals. In the end Gove was forced into a humiliating climb-down, co-authoring an opinion piece with David Laws welcoming the introduction of universal free school meals (though even afterwards Cummings was used to try to belittle his involvement).

3. Duty for schools to provide careers advice

Gove faces criticism as delays to careers guidance jeopardises students' futures

As the education secretary's critics unite against the devastating impact his policy on careers advice is having, schools are left in limbo, awaiting delayed guidance

The Guardian, 11 March 2014

How Gove tried to stop it:

Gove decided to hand legal responsibility for careers guidance to schools, with no extra resources to back it up – or updated guidance for how to do so, threatening to jeopardise thousands of young people's futures. Nick Clegg and Vince Cable both went on the attack, demanding Gove provide long-delayed revised guidance on schools' statutory duty to provide guidance. In March 2014 the Department for Education said that guidance could still be a full six months away, falling too late for every school leaver that summer.

What we achieved:

In early March 2014 both Vince Cable and Nick Clegg criticised the inadequacy and patchiness of careers advice in schools, with Nick saying he would personally ensure it improved. On March 27, the Government published its comprehensive advice.

THINGS MICHAEL GOVE DID MANAGE TO STOP

1. Mandatory PSHE, including sex education

Nick Clegg and Michael Gove at war over updating sex education guidance

Sex education guidance in schools will not be modernised because “changing social mores” will make fresh advice out of date, Education secretary Michael Gove says.

Daily Telegraph, 5 September 2013

What Gove stopped:

In September 2013 Gove ruled out modernising sex education lessons in schools, despite the syllabus not having been updated for more than a decade. Nick Clegg criticised Gove for refusing to update the guidance to take into account the impact of the internet since 2000. Nick said: “At the moment there are lots of schools, academies, free schools and so on, who don’t need to follow the [sex and relationship] guidelines, even the outdated ones. But I’ll be open with you; this [view] is not shared across Government. I haven’t been able to persuade Michael Gove and the Conservatives to move all the way on this.” Gove confirmed he was refusing to budge, stating: “As soon as you create a new set of guidance to respond to new and challenging circumstances there is a risk that you crystallise something that new technology or changing social mores will render time-bound.”

2. Nutritional standards in all schools

Jamie Oliver in blistering attack on Michael Gove over poor school diet

The chef and campaigner attacks rules that allow academies to ignore nutrition guidelines

The Guardian, 22 April 2012

What Gove stopped:

Despite protestations from Liberal Democrats, celebrity chefs and many teachers, Gove refused to make new academy schools and free schools subject to national standards on nutrition in school meals. In April 2012 Jamie Oliver said: “The health of millions of children could be effected by this one man. When there is a national obesity crisis unfolding around us, I honestly think he is playing with fire.” In June 2014, new academies and free schools were made to sign up. But even so, Gove refused to make the successive waves of academies and free schools, set up between 2010 and June 2014, sign up to the new code. Instead they were being “encouraged to sign up voluntarily”.

3. More local accountability and support for schools

Schools minister seeks powers to intervene at struggling academies

Liberal Democrat MP David Laws wants to introduce 'middle tier' to deal with schools that need help to improve performance

The Guardian, 26 November 2014

What Gove stopped:

Far from setting schools free, the academies and free schools programme in its current form puts schools under the direct oversight of the Department for Education. This has led to problems in schools, including high-profile cases in Birmingham; and schools that need improvement going unnoticed at a local level. David Laws called for a 'middle tier' of governance to oversee schools that are failing or require improvement, made up of local authorities, academy chains and the most successful head teachers. Gove and the Conservatives have consistently refused anything that would devolve power away from the Department for Education.

4. Ofsted inspecting chains of academies

Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw 'spitting blood' over row with Michael Gove's Education Department

The Independent, 26 January 2014

What Gove stopped:

Gove blocked Ofsted from judging the performance of academy chains which oversee schools, despite Ofsted having the right to inspect local authorities for this purpose. Wilshaw made repeated demands to be given explicit powers to inspect the head offices of academy chains in the same way Ofsted can look at local council children's services, but to no avail. Instead, Sir Michael was subjected to wilful attacks from sources apparently close to Gove, including being described as "dishonest", while his appointment was described as the "second worst personnel decision we made". In January 2015 Gove's successor Nicky Morgan slightly softened the stance, allowing Ofsted to publish information about the performance of academy chains. But she has refused any formal extension of Ofsted's powers and Ofsted still won't be allowed to make judgements about whether a trust is effective or not.

THINGS WE TRIED TO STOP & WOULD REVERSE

1. Free schools in places where new schools are not needed

Free schools row rumbles on among coalition

Liberal Democrats' president Tim Farron says Michael Gove must prioritise creation of local authority primary school places

The Guardian, 12 May 2014

What Gove forced through:

Gove's obsession with his free schools programme meant that he prioritised money for his pet project rather than spending money on local authority primary school places where they were most needed. Instead free schools were being built in places where schools were already under-subscribed. In May 2014 Tim Farron said: "The evidence is that there are many parts of the country – south-west London, Liverpool and Durham from the top of my head – where there is particular pressure on school places, and yet the money, the extra £400m coming from basic needs, is going instead to support free schools, some of which are not really meeting any demand at all for additional school places. It's important that Michael Gove rows in behind what is the number one priority for anyone that is concerned about education, but certainly his department, which is to meet the basic needs of providing school places."

2. Free schools not needing qualified teachers

Clegg pledges qualified teachers in move away from free schools

The Liberal Democrats want more qualified teachers following a core curriculum if they retain power after 2015, Nick Clegg announced. Trying to separate his party from the Conservatives, Clegg said pupils and parents deserved "basic safeguards".

ITV, 13 June 2014

What Gove forced through:

In July 2012, Gove unilaterally announced that academies would no longer be required to employ teachers with Qualified Teacher Status, as maintained schools do. This decision was taken without cross-government consultation, and used Labour legislation that left decisions on qualified teachers to the Secretary of State. The Liberal Democrats have been very clear that we do not agree with this and would require this basic safeguard in free schools and academies. Despite pressure from Nick Clegg and David Laws, when Nicky Morgan replaced the fired Michael Gove in July 2014 she pledged to continue his work, including supporting unqualified teachers in free schools.

3. Free schools not needing planning permission

Planning changes could see free schools in shops and offices

By Angela Harrison
Education correspondent, BBC News

BBC, 25 January 2013

What Gove forced through:

In January 2013 Gove announced changes to planning rules in England that removed barriers to the opening of free schools, including allowing schools to be opened in shops and offices – even if these buildings had not been approved for ‘change of use’ by the local council. At the time Gove said: “I want to make it as easy as possible for free school proposers not only to find buildings but move into them.” Liberal Democrats objected to the changes, but ultimately were forced to concede.