

Britain  
*forward*  
not back

Children  
*forward*  
not back

**Britain's future depends on our children. The start children get in life is vital to the kind of society we become. We will fail as a country unless we provide all children with adequate healthcare, the best education, protection from violence, and address the special problems of the most disadvantaged. Our duty is to help all children reach their potential.**

**It is for parents, of course, to bring up their children. As parents, we have long fought to make their future bright through better education, improving healthcare and drug prevention. With renewed vigour we will carry that fight into the future.**

The love, care and attention children receive from their parents are the main factors in their future success and happiness. They are the best guarantee that a child will thrive. It's not easy, however, being a parent. You learn on the job, never sure whether you are doing the right thing. Nor have the challenges got any easier, though we are more prosperous and our children have more opportunities than any previous generation. Indeed these are often the very reasons that bringing up children can be so difficult nowadays.

While medical advances – and an improving NHS – have lessened the deadly threat of childhood diseases, they have been replaced by new dangers linked to drugs, alcohol and obesity. We are working hard to tackle childhood poverty but now we worry about violence and pornography on the internet. It's a real achievement that more talented young people go to university but they face increased pressure for skilled jobs and global competition.

Government should never needlessly interfere in the lives of parents or children. The state does not raise children – people do. But government should not abandon families either. Most parents believe that the role of an effective government is to support them in their choices and to help protect their children from new threats. Parents expect government to be on their side as they bring up their children: providing help, support and security for themselves and their children when it is needed. Labour acknowledges this limited role but also important responsibility for government.

Parents are, of course, responsible for their children. But government's key responsibilities are to:

- ensure the provision of high-quality education, skills and training to help prepare children and young people for the challenges ahead
- support parents financially and help them balance the competing pressures of work and family life
- protect children when they are at risk from threats to their safety and health
- tackle poverty among disadvantaged children to give them the opportunities to develop their full potential.

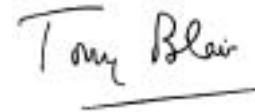
There are those who say even this limited role for government is too much; that any role for government is an intrusion into family life. We reject this view. It is born of the belief that there is no such thing as society. Britain's hard working families cannot go back to that.

**That's why our priorities are to:**

- provide more support for all parents through better maternity and paternity provision, better access to flexible working patterns, more advice and help for parents when they want it, with support to help prevent children eating junk food, smoking or taking drugs
- give all children a fair chance by addressing child poverty through new work opportunities, better financial support and investment in high-quality, universal, early years provision and childcare
- work with parents, schools and the wider community to create a framework in which children grow up with a sense of responsibility through record investment in personalised education, more activities and places to go for young people, and greater opportunities to volunteer. Alongside that we will continue to tackle problems of poor behaviour in schools and deal with anti-social behaviour.

Labour believes in a strong and stable society. We believe government has to be on the side of parents and their children. Whether through increased financial support for parents, better schools for

all, or new measures to protect children, this Labour Government will continue supporting parents in the difficult, but vital, task of bringing up their children. Labour has the right values for new and challenging times, rewarding the hard working majority not the privileged few. We want to move Britain forward so that every family gets the support they need to give their children the very best start in life.



**Tony Blair MP  
Prime Minister and  
Leader of the Labour Party**



**Ruth Kelly MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
and Skills**

# Children *forward* not back

## **Our values**

***We live in a rapidly changing world where bringing up your children is one of the most challenging and rewarding things that we do. Every parent wants the best start for their children – and for most parents the happiness and well-being of their children is what matters most.***

Children today enjoy huge opportunities and in many ways better life chances than ever before. School standards are rising and children are achieving more. Higher living standards, and economic and technological changes, have opened up new opportunities for travel, communication and knowledge. But with those changes come new challenges: both parents are often in jobs with more pressures on their time, grandparents and the extended family may be far away, and family patterns are more complex.

Children have greater freedoms and are exposed to new and different risks – whether it is drugs, alcohol or the

internet, and commercial or peer group pressure. In this rapidly changing world, it is more important than ever to support parents in giving children an upbringing that provides them with the right tools to succeed, to flourish and to grow up as responsible citizens. This is not just important for the children and families themselves, but for society as a whole – the next generation is the future on which we all depend. That's why children are the absolute political, economic and social priority of this Government.

What happens at home is as, if not more, important than anything the best nursery or best teacher can provide. The understanding, love and care given by parents are the best guarantee that children will thrive. But parents tell us that they want support to give their children the best start in life. While they don't need the Government to tell them how to bring up their children, parents do want government action to help prevent their children eating junk food, smoking and taking drugs. We share responsibility for

our children's future, and to give children lifelong opportunities parents need time, money, good childcare and a government that is on their side.

We believe that each and every child deserves the chance to develop their full potential and lead a fulfilling life. That's why we pledged to eradicate child poverty in a generation. Poverty casts a long shadow – if children are born into poverty they are less likely to be healthy, less likely to succeed at school, less likely to get qualifications and get a job, and more likely to be trapped in a lifetime of deprivation. So investment in jobs, in financial support and early years education is the key to unlocking the cycle of deprivation. This is good for these individuals and for society as a whole.

Growing up is about developing a wide range of abilities: to learn, to socialise, to form relationships with others, to behave responsibly and to enjoy life. It is up to parents, the community and government to help develop the right framework that

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### Since 1997

For mothers, paid maternity leave increased from 14 weeks at £55 per week to 26 weeks at £106 per week.

### Since 1997

For fathers, two weeks' paid paternity leave for the first time.

### Since 1997

We have lifted 600,000 children out of poverty.



gives children and young people the best chance of growing into happy and fulfilled adults.

For most parents, our children are everything to us: our hopes, our ambitions, and our future. Our children are cherished and loved. But a minority are not so fortunate. That is why it is a priority to ensure that these children are safe and secure through far-reaching reform of children's services that maximises opportunity for every child and minimises risk to every child.

If we are to create a society founded on opportunity, social justice and responsibility – we have to begin with the next generation.

## Progress

In 1997 we inherited one of the worst records on child poverty in the developed world – over 3.2 million children were living in relative poverty. We were bottom of the league when it came to maternity and paternity provision, and getting a nursery place was a postcode lottery. For too long, the system of support for the most vulnerable children was marked by poor coordination, a failure to share information, and weak accountability. The

work of the frontline was hampered by a lack of effective training and poor management, and there was virtually no support for parents.

But despite this inheritance, we have been able to make a real difference to the lives of children and families – they are our priority in terms of investment, policy and delivery.

### All parents supported

Labour has supported parents so they are able to make choices about how to balance their family and working lives by:

- increasing paid maternity leave from 14 weeks at £55 per week in 1997 to 26 weeks at £106 per week now
- introducing two weeks' paid paternity leave for the first time
- giving all employees the right to take time off work to deal with family emergencies
- introducing a new right to request flexible working for parents of children under six and of disabled children up to the age of 18.

Parents need support not only to balance their work and family lives, but they may want someone to turn to in order to cope with the day-to-day challenges they face in bringing up their children. The Tories believe that the role of the state is limited

to intervention when things go wrong – when children are victims of abuse or subject to harm. But parents want government to play a role in a range of areas – to help them to keep their children healthy, free of drugs and alcohol, and safe from road traffic. That's why we have:

- undertaken to provide pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and young children in low-income families with vouchers that can be exchanged for fresh fruit and vegetables. The scheme is backed by a new communications campaign to help those families improve their diets and wider health
- provided fresh fruit each day for all children in infant school
- encouraged more children and their parents to beat the traffic and improve their health by walking or cycling to school through the Travelling to School action plan
- funded a three-year programme to pilot ways of reducing teenage pregnancy and substance misuse, and improving sexual health. The FRANK campaign informs young people and their parents, carers and families about the effects and risks of taking illicit drugs
- introduced a programme of drugs education into schools. This sits alongside guidance for head teachers in dealing with pupils who take or sell

**Since 1997**

**We have increased financial support for families with children by £10 billion in real terms compared with 1997.**

**Since 1997**

**By October this year, families with children will be on average £1,400 per year better off compared with 1997, with those in the poorest fifth of the population on average £3,200 per year better off.**



drugs, including drugs testing and exclusion from school

- introduced new measures in the 2003 Licensing Act that close many loopholes currently allowing under-18s to obtain and consume alcohol, including penalties for those who sell to minors and for under-18s who try to buy alcohol
- introduced a package of measures including cameras, 20mph zones, traffic calming and public education campaigns that have led to a 40 per cent reduction in the number of children killed and seriously injured on our roads.

**All children given a fair chance**

- We have set an ambitious long-term goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020. Since 1997 we have lifted 600,000 children out of poverty, on track to reach our target of taking a quarter of children out of poverty by 2004-05. The New Deal has helped a quarter of a million lone parents into paid work – lone parent employment is now at a high of 56 per cent, ten points up on the 1997 employment rate.

- Within two years, we reduced the proportion of lone parents falling into severe hardship from 31 per cent to 19 per cent.
- We have increased financial support for families with children by £10 billion in real terms compared with 1997; there is an extra £5.45 a week in Child Benefit, and six million families get help with tax credits, the vast majority of the money paid direct to mothers.
- By October this year, families with children will be on average £1,400 a year better off compared with 1997, with those in the poorest fifth of the population on average £3,200 a year better off.

Early years education and childcare are a priority for Labour and we have:

- delivered a guaranteed part-time nursery place for every three- and four-year-old whose parents want one
- established over 500 Sure Start local programmes – a ground-breaking new scheme bringing together childcare, family support and health services in the poorest areas. This is reaching

400,000 children in disadvantaged areas – a quarter of children under the age of four who are in poverty

- created 525,000 additional sustainable childcare places, more than 8,000 after-school clubs and the biggest ever investment in nursery provision since the Second World War – with 1,300 Neighbourhood Nurseries.

We already know that this is transforming the life chances of children. Two years of high-quality nursery education gives children a six-month boost in their performance at the end of Key Stage 1 – a key determinant of how well children will do at GCSE level and beyond.

**All children growing up to be responsible adults**

We want all children to behave responsibly – but that can only be done with parents, children, young people, schools and the wider community working together. We said in *Schools forward not back* that we are making record investments in schools and teaching to ensure that personalised learning

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enables all children to flourish and develop their full potential. But at the same time it is crucial that we address problems of poor behaviour that occur in a minority of schools.

Labour has a zero tolerance approach to bad behaviour in schools:

- we have invested £885 million in improving behaviour and attendance. And, while we have reduced the number of exclusions – between 1996-97 and 2002-03 the number fell by 25 per cent – we have also strengthened the right of head teachers to exclude children from school when they need to.

In most schools classroom disruption is minimal. Our approach has been to:

- support schools through advice and training on maintaining discipline. We have also worked in partnership with teachers to develop admissions protocols to share 'hard-to-place' pupils fairly across all schools
- ensure parents take their responsibilities seriously. This is why we have made more parenting programmes available, introduced parenting contracts through which parents work with schools to improve behaviour, and for very difficult cases we have introduced Parenting Orders administered by the courts. These require parents to attend a programme tailored to their needs to help them build their skills and reinforce their responsibilities
- provide quality on-site provision within schools for those children who can't be in class through over 1,500 Learning Support Units, learning mentors and behaviour support teams. At the same time we have extended the provision of quality off-site provision – such as Pupil Referral Units – for those who should not be in school
- challenge the culture that tolerates absence from school through improved advice and guidance, parenting classes, truancy sweeps and, as a last resort, Fixed Penalty Notices for parents of persistent truants
- introduce measures to prevent young people from engaging in anti-social behaviour. These include: investing in positive activities for young people in high-crime areas during their school holidays, which reached over 75,000 children last summer; Anti-Social Behaviour Orders; child safety orders; and youth inclusion programmes which provide a range of activities for children

most at risk of offending

- encourage responsible citizenship with the introduction of citizenship education to the National Curriculum and support youth volunteering through programmes like Millennium Volunteering.

Underpinning this, youth services have provided improved support, information and guidance to teenagers. In the past two years the proportion of teenagers who neither have a job nor receive any education or training has fallen by over 10 per cent.

### **All children secure and safe**

All children should grow up not just free from poverty but also from fear, and be full of hope. Sadly for some of our children this is not the case: they grow up without the comfort and support that many take for granted.

Victoria Climbié was one such child. The details of her case shocked the nation. As a result Labour has put in place the most far-reaching reform of children's services in decades – our Every Child Matters agenda. Labour recognises the importance of vital children's services – from social work to foster care – not just for the sake of the children, but for wider society too. The changes we have put in place will ultimately improve the safety and protection of children, help reduce educational failure, cut levels of offending and improve the nation's health.

- Spending on this vital area has increased by nearly 30 per cent in real terms between 1996-97 and 2004-05.
- The newly appointed Children's Commissioner will promote awareness of the views and interests of children; independent of government, the Commissioner can conduct inquiries into any issue which impacts on children's well-being and be a powerful force for improving services. They will also ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard in government and elsewhere as policies are formed and services delivered.
- The life chances of children in care remain shamefully poor. However, we have put in place measures to improve stability for these children; to improve support for foster carers; to increase the numbers of children adopted; and to improve the help offered to young adults when they leave care.
- Teenage pregnancy can waste lives and

restrict opportunity. The children of teenage parents are more likely to grow up in poverty. There is still much to do, but the measures we have put in place – from education in schools to coordinated health support and media campaigns – have had an impact.

The rate of conceptions for under-18s in England has fallen by 9.8 per cent between 1998 and 2003. This reverses the upward trend witnessed prior to that.

- We have provided extra resources to enable children with disabilities to have a mainstream education while recognising the continuing importance of special schools in meeting particular needs. Funding allocated for Special Educational Needs (SEN) has increased from £2.7 billion in 1999-2000 to £3.7 billion in 2004-05.
- In schools we have taken action on bullying. We recognise that protecting children from fear and intimidation is vital if standards are to rise and parents are to be confident when they leave their child at the school gates. We have established the Anti-Bullying-Alliance and last November saw the first ever National Anti-Bullying Week. This received a phenomenal public and media response as the millionth anti-bullying blue wristband was handed out by David Beckham.

## **Goals**

***More support for parents, opportunities for all children, better standards of behaviour***

Our goal is to create a society that supports families as they bring up their children and gives every child the chance to thrive.

- We want to give every child the very best start in life so that they can develop and realise their full potential and enjoy every opportunity.
- We want parents to have more choice about how to balance their working and family lives through improved maternity and paternity leave, flexible working and more financial support.
- We want to support parents in keeping their children healthy and safe by tackling under-age smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, dangers from the internet and eating junk food. And we want parents to know that when their children are at school they will be offered healthy and appetising meals.
- We want to maintain the progress we



### With Labour:

**We will work to achieve a step change in the quality of school meals.**

have made on poverty and deprivation. Our goal is to halve child poverty by 2010-11, on the way to eradicating child poverty in a generation through financial support, employment opportunities and excellent public services.

- We want to ensure that all families have access to universal, affordable, quality childcare that meets their individual family needs, enriches children's lives and provides a boost to their life chances. We want to support families as they make their own choices about how to organise their family lives but there can only be real choice if we invest in public services.
- We also want to help parents enable their children to grow up to be responsible citizens. That means investing in personalised education and activities for young people, ensuring that schools and parents work together to tackle behaviour problems, and clamping down on anti-social behaviour.
- We know that we must do more to maximise the life chances of children in difficult circumstances. We aim to ensure that, wherever possible, we prevent what happened to Victoria Climbié happening to other children through more joined-up, preventative and effective services.

We have an ambitious reform agenda, backed by funding, to move forward in the coming years.

## Our plans for the future

### *All parents supported*

We will give parents more choice about how they can balance their family and working lives by:

- extending paid maternity leave for a further three months – worth £1,400 to each mother – with the goal of 12 months' paid leave by the end of the next Parliament
- giving mothers a new right to transfer a portion of their maternity leave and pay to fathers
- providing extra help to employers, particularly small businesses, by giving them greater certainty about when employees are returning to work and simplifying the administration of maternity leave and pay
- consulting on extending the request for flexible working to carers and parents of older children.

We will provide both more universal and more targeted help to parents.

- We are investing £50 million over two years to fund a consortium of voluntary sector organisations and other partners to develop a new programme to work with parents and help them support their children's early learning and development. There's also an extra £20 million for the Parenting Fund to provide universal information sessions for parents when children move to primary and then on to secondary school. This will build on Parentline Plus, which we are developing as a resource for all parents to draw on when

they need advice and support. Last year alone it responded to close on 100,000 calls from parents.

We will work to achieve a step change in the quality of school meals. We will introduce:

- a new vocational qualification for school caterers and provide more support for schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in drawing up catering contracts
- new minimum health specifications for processed foods – to reduce fat, sugar and salt content – from this September. And from September 2006, even tougher minimum standards will come into force. Monitoring will improve too; Ofsted will have to take account of school food in its inspection process from this September and we want a new School Food Trust to, among other things, help empower parents to work with schools to raise standards. This will include substantial funding enabling the trust to assist schools nationwide. We will further improve kitchens, equipment and dining areas through our Building Schools for the Future programme and the additional investment in primary schools announced in the 2005 Budget.

We will help parents to tackle threats to their child's well-being.

- Sales of cigarettes to under-16s are illegal. However, in practice, it is still too easy for a child of that age to buy cigarettes. We will legislate to ban retailers from selling cigarettes on a temporary or permanent basis to anyone if they repeatedly flout the law. And to complement Stop Now Orders,

## **Forward to investment in children**

# **Record levels of investment in education and childcare will be increased in a third Labour term.**

we will give Trading Standards Officers the ability to serve Fixed Penalty Notices on retailers who break the law.

- We are setting a national target that by 2010 we will halt the year-on-year increase in obesity among under-11s, in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole. This is on top of our existing teaching as part of the National Curriculum and support provided through our healthy schools programme.
- We will work with Ofcom to tighten the rules on broadcast advertising, and sponsorship and promotion of food and drink. We will secure the rules' effective implementation by broadcasters in order to ensure that children are properly protected from encouragements to eat too many high-fat, salty and sugary foods – both during children's programmes and at other times when large numbers of children are watching. If these rules do not work, we will legislate. Ofcom have strengthened the rules on alcohol advertising to prevent irresponsible targeting of young people. We are exploring with the industry whether additional measures are needed to protect young people from the dangers of binge drinking.
- We will ensure that laptops for children in our national leasing scheme are equipped with parental controls, and we will look at what other measures are needed to make the internet safe for children.

### **All children given a fair chance**

We will continue to tackle the roots of child poverty by helping parents into work and increasing financial support to families.

- We will implement an integrated package of support to help lone parents get into work: offering clear financial gain, childcare support, and advice and active engagement with specialist employment advisers.
- We are committed to increasing the child element of the Child Tax Credit at least in line with average earnings up to and including 2007-08. This will make an important contribution towards achieving our target of halving the number of children in relative low-income households by 2010-11 and eradicating child poverty by 2020.
- Improving the availability of decent housing and enhancing financial inclusion is also critical to tackling deprivation. We are investing substantial additional resources in social housing, with a target to ensure all homes in the social sector are of decent quality and more than 70 per cent of those in the private sector meet a similar standard.
- We also want to build on the best practice in schools that tailor learning experiences to the needs of the individual child. Children who face the greatest challenges in learning to read and write need to be helped early on.

Building on the literacy hour, tailored support can prevent children falling behind. This is why we will extend the support offered to primary head teachers to manage and integrate tailored catch-up programmes.

- We will introduce a Child Trust Fund from this April for every baby born after September 2002 of £250 for all children and £500 for children in poorer families at birth. We are consulting about further payments at age seven and at secondary school age. As the fund grows with the contribution of parents, grandparents and others, all young people at the age of 18 will have a springboard for their future – giving them real prospects for success.
- We will ensure that every child with special educational needs gets the education they need to fulfil their potential. The Special Educational Needs Strategy will continue to build parents' confidence in special education. We have a clear, long-term agenda to ensure early intervention wherever possible; that all children learn in an environment that fosters high expectations; and better, more joined-up delivery of services.
- Early years and childcare services will become a universal arm of the welfare state that can respond to the varied needs of children and families. By 2008-09 we will have quadrupled investment in childcare and early years provision from £1.1 billion to

£4.4 billion with an additional £860 million on the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit.

By 2010 we will:

- build on the success of Sure Start by establishing 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres – one in every community – offering information, healthcare, family support, childcare and other services
- extend free early education entitlement for all three- and four-year-olds to 15 hours a week towards a goal of 20 hours a week, and we will offer greater flexibility to parents in choosing how they use this free entitlement to fit in with their working patterns
- help parents with the cost of childcare by: increasing the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit; introducing a tax break worth up to £50 a week for each parent for employer-provided childcare vouchers; and working with the Greater London Authority and boroughs to reduce childcare costs for low-income families in London
- legislate at the first opportunity to give local authorities a new duty to secure sufficient childcare to meet local need. The Transformation Fund of £125 million a year from April 2006 will help improve the quality and sustainability of childcare in the private and voluntary sectors in particular
- offer parents of school-age children affordable school-based childcare for children aged up to 14, on weekdays between 8am and 6pm, all year round. Schools will be encouraged to extend their provision either on their own or in partnership with the private or voluntary sector. Children will be provided with enriching activities such as sport, art, music and other after-school clubs
- parents, rightly, want to be assured that their child is involved in high-quality early years education. We want childcare in this country to be among the best in the world, with a better-qualified workforce with more workers trained to professional level.

#### **All children growing up to be responsible adults**

We will work together with parents, schools and the wider community to create a framework in which children grow up with a sense of responsibility to themselves, their families and the community.

We will continue to raise the standards of behaviour in schools.

- We will develop new powers for head teachers to search suspect pupils for knives and other weapons, and we will raise the age at which knives can be bought to 19. There will be new local agreements on how police and schools will work together to keep our schools safe for those who work and learn there.
- Where Ofsted grades the behaviour in a school as unsatisfactory, local authorities will have to ensure that specialist help for improving behaviour is channelled to those schools straight away. In the future, Ofsted will also revisit within a year any school with behaviour problems.
- We also believe that when schools work together they can manage challenging pupils better, and share expertise, facilities and resources to buy in provision. We want every secondary school to be part of such a group by 2007.
- We have a target to reduce the 2002-03 level of school absence by eight per cent by 2007-08.

For young people:

- We will reform and improve youth services. We want all young people to lead enriched and exciting lives. We want teenagers to have more places to go and things to do, particularly in deprived areas. And we want all teenagers to have support helping them make the right decisions about their lives. Over the next three years £100 million will be invested, in response to the Russell Commission report, to enable all over-16s to participate in high-quality volunteering opportunities.

For the minority of young people involved in anti-social behaviour we will:

- introduce Fixed Penalty Notices for Disorder for children under 16
- introduce new powers to require parents to pay compensation for damage committed by children under ten
- double the number of parents of young offenders who get a parenting course, either through a Parenting Order or on a voluntary basis
- increase by 50 per cent by 2008 the number of programmes aimed at identifying and supporting the young

### **With Labour**

**We will build on the success of Sure Start by establishing 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres – one in every community.**

people most at risk of involvement in crime

- provide an additional £25 million from 2006-07 to 2007-08 to extend coverage of targeted early intervention programmes to stop under-13s at risk of getting involved in crime.

#### **All children safe and secure**

- Children's Trusts will be developed across the country by 2008, bringing together professionals at a local level to integrate services for children. Specific funding of £85.5 million by 2008 will help local authorities implement our fundamental Every Child Matters reforms.
- Practical joint work will be supported with better sharing of information. All areas will have databases making it easy to find out which professionals have had contact with different children. This will help professionals work together more effectively so that failure to share information does not damage children's well-being and safety.
- We will improve the children's service workforce. In schools, early years services, social services, foster care and elsewhere, the commitment and quality of frontline staff is vital. We will develop a more flexible career framework to encourage progression within and across sectors. By doing this we can attract, and then keep, more skilled and motivated people.



**The Tories would take Britain back**

**The Conservatives' commitment to cut £35 billion from public spending would put at risk Labour's investment in affordable childcare and early years provision.**

**The Tories would take Britain back**

**The Tories have made no commitment to eradicate child poverty altogether by 2020.**

## The Tories would take Britain back

### A failed Tory past

When the Conservatives were in power, the proportion of children living in poverty more than tripled. One in three children was living in poverty by the time the Tories left office. In 1985 the Tories allowed Child Benefit to fall below the 1979 level they had inherited and the real-terms value of the benefit never rose back above that level for the entire time they remained in power. They froze Child Benefit for three years running. Maternity leave lasted 14 weeks and was paid at just £55 a week. There were no Child Trust Funds, no Sure Start Children's Centres, and no guarantee of a free nursery place for every three- and four-year-old.

Since 1997, the Tories have continued their opposition to key measures to help families with children. They opposed Labour's tax credits. They opposed the increase in maternity pay and allowances. They voted against giving mothers 26 weeks' paid leave and a further 26 weeks' unpaid maternity leave. They voted against paternity leave, adoptive leave, and the right to request flexible working. These basic minimum rights are part of the Social Chapter and Michael Howard is determined to continue his opposition to the Social Chapter: 'We

want out of the Social Chapter, which is a threat to British jobs.' (Michael Howard, Conservative conference speech, 5 October 2004).

### Child poverty

Under the Tories, child poverty in Britain grew to shocking levels. We believe that child poverty is one of the most shameful legacies of the Tory years. Yet in opposition, the Tories have opposed all the key measures Labour has taken to tackle child poverty. They have opposed the National Minimum Wage, Labour's tax credits and the New Deal – all of which have been crucial in the fight against poverty. If the Tories got back into power, they would take Britain back to a failed past on child poverty. They have made no commitment to match Labour's goals to halve the number of children in relative poverty by 2010, and eradicate child poverty altogether by 2020. Instead, they are committed to axing the New Deal for Lone Parents – a key measure in lifting children out of poverty. Their commitment to £35 billion cuts would put at risk Labour's investment to lift children out of poverty.

### £35 billion cuts

The Conservatives' commitment to cut £35 billion from public spending would put at risk Labour's investment in affordable childcare and early years provision. Nursery places and universal Sure Start Children's Centres would all be imperilled.

Oliver Letwin has admitted: 'that by the end of the parliament 2011-12, the end of the economic cycle, we'll be spending about £35 billion less than Labour.' (*Breakfast with Frost*, 28 November 2004)

The Tories cannot match Labour's commitment to increasing the number of Sure Start Children's Centres to 3,500 by 2010. As part of the Tories' plans to cut £35 billion from public spending, Oliver Letwin committed his party to freezing spending on all departmental budgets 'outside the NHS and schools budgets' (*Medium Term Expenditure Strategy*, 16 February 2004). The effect of the Tories' two-year cash freeze on non-schools spending would mean immediate real-terms cuts to funding for early years and Sure Start Children's Centres.

### £1 billion cut to state schools

In addition to their £35 billion cuts, the Tories are committed to a further cut of £1 billion to schools. Their schools voucher scheme will use taxpayers' money to subsidise fee-paying parents and transfer millions from state schools into private schools. Over £1 billion would be cut from schools to pay for the Tories' bureaucratic and costly voucher scheme. That's money cut from schools for all children to subsidise the private education of a privileged few. The Centre for Policy Studies estimates that about 176,000 independent school pupils (about 30 per cent of the current total of

589,000) would be able to get the £5,600 voucher at a cost of £989 million. The costs of setting up such a bureaucratic system of vouchers would take the total costs way over £1 billion.

backtrack immediately. The truth is the Tories' commitment to cut £35 billion from public spending would put Labour's investment in affordable childcare at risk.

### **Cuts to Children's Centres**

Since its introduction, the Conservatives have argued against Sure Start. When it was first introduced, David Willetts, the then Shadow Education Secretary, claimed it was a further step towards a 'nanny state' (*BBC Online*, 23 July 1998). Oliver Letwin, when he was Shadow Home Secretary, wanted to cut money from Sure Start to spend on a Home Office drugs programme and would 'use some of the money currently being spent on Sure Start to fund the programme.' (*Cutting the Conveyor Belt to Crime*, Conservative policy document, October 2002, page 5). And the effect of the Tories' two-year cash freeze on non-schools spending would be to reduce spending immediately in real terms on Children's Centres and Sure Start programmes.

### **Cutting help for families**

Labour's tax credits make work pay and help families with the costs of childcare. Six million families, including more than ten million children, are benefiting from the new tax credits. Tax credits have helped lift 600,000 children out of poverty and have resulted in a rise in incomes for families of £1,400 a year on average. Michael Howard thinks this is 'the wrong path' for Britain, while David Willetts has called them 'ludicrous'. Both the tax credits and the National Minimum Wage were opposed by the Tories.

The Tories have also refused to match Labour's commitment to extend paid maternity leave to nine months. Michael Howard said: 'We'll keep the current statutory system of maternity and paternity leave, as well as the right to request flexible working. But it will take a lot to persuade me of the need to go further.' (Michael Howard, speech at Conservative Central Office, 11 November 2004).

### **False Tory promises on childcare**

The Tories are offering false promises on childcare they know they cannot afford. In November 2004 they briefed the press that they would give mothers £150 a week to look after their children at home, but the Tories were then forced to

# Children *forward* not back



**Britain's future depends on our children. The start children get in life is vital to the kind of society we become. We will fail as a country unless we provide all children with adequate healthcare, the best education, protection from violence, and address the special problems of the most disadvantaged. Our duty is to help all children reach their potential.**

It is for parents, of course, to bring up their children. As parents, we have long fought to make their future bright through better education, improving healthcare and drug prevention. With renewed vigour we will carry that fight into the future.

The love, care and attention children receive from their parents are the main factors in their future success and happiness. It is the best guarantee that a child will thrive. It's not easy, however, being a parent. You learn on the job, never sure whether you are doing the right thing. Nor have the challenges got any easier though we are more prosperous and our children have more opportunities than any previous generation. Indeed these are often the very reasons that bringing up children can be so difficult nowadays.

**If you would like to find out more about our policies, join the Labour Party or make a donation to Labour's election fund, please call **08705 900 200** or visit our website at [www.labour.org.uk](http://www.labour.org.uk)**

Images: Richard Maude.

The use of an image of an individual does not necessarily imply support for the Labour Party.

