

CONSERVATIVE CHALLENGE TO BACK EDUCATION REFORMS

Final decision to implement two-tier will be made after 2009 local elections.

A "Better Schools" programme with a relentless focus on raising standards.

Only the Conservatives can give Island education the clear direction it needs.

The Conservative Group has announced today that it will seek a fresh mandate from the public for its "Better Schools" programme in the 2009 IW Council elections. It will make the move to a two-tier system the centrepiece of its education plans and challenges other parties to support the move to secure "better schools for the future".

The Better Schools programme will be developed over the next few months but will focus on a clear commitment to finalise the Island's move to a two-tier model, as the best way of delivering better education for young people and improving their chances of securing good quality employment. Preparations for the two-tier change will continue apace over the next 10 months, with the current formal consultation concluding in September 2008, before statutory notices are published in the spring of 2009. With detailed preparations completed, the Conservatives will seek re-election with a pledge to implement the final proposals if they are returned with a majority of seats – irrespective of whether the elections take place in May or June.

Cllr David Pugh, Leader of the Isle of Wight Council said: "We are putting our plans for reforms to the Island's education system at the heart of the Conservative re-election campaign – giving the Island a clear choice in 2009. We are calling this our "Better Schools" programme – with a relentless focus on raising standards.

"The move to two-tier will be central to this programme, but we will gradually unveil other policies that demonstrate we understand how to give young people the best possible start in life. It is the top priority of this administration, and will be of our next administration, if we are re-elected.

"It has always been the case that the timing of the Council's decision to adopt a two-tier education structure would take the process close to the next local elections. This announcement will allow the Island to have its say before the ultimate decision is made.

"We believe that there is popular support for adopting a two-tier system – the election will test that view. The choice in 2009 will be clear – continue on the clear path to bring the Island into line with the rest of the country; or scrap the whole process and return to the uncertainty of the past. We have moved forward from discussion to action, and now is the time to deliver."

Cllr Alan Wells, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People added: "The Council has listened carefully to views over the past few months as to how the plans should be put into practice – such as the size and distribution of primary schools. The proposals now on the table have in many cases been shaped by local communities. Putting them before the electorate completes this listening process.

"I would strongly urge anyone who wishes to see "Better Schools" on the Island to support the Conservatives – the party committed to making this a reality. "Preparations for two-tier are continuing. Let us transform our education system for the long-term benefit of our young people. The Island can be the best – let's make it happen."

For more information, contact Cllr David Pugh on 07779 999808