

## Labour's private schools tax raid 'will make education more elitist'

Labour plans to add VAT to school fees if it wins power at the next election, claiming it could raise £1.6bn to improve state education

5 The Labour Party's private school tax raid would force pupils out and risk institutions closing for good, headteachers have warned, despite Sir Keir Starmer claiming he wants the sector to "thrive". The party plans to add VAT to fees if it wins power at the next election, which it claims could raise £1.6 billion to improve state education.

But researchers have questioned this figure amid warnings the policy may make no money at all while pushing up to 40,000 children out of private places.

10 In an interview with Jewish News last week, Sir Keir said he had no "ideological" opposition to fee-paying education, adding: "We have got fantastic independent schools. I want them to thrive."

But headmasters told The Telegraph that many parents would be "pushed into unaffordability" if VAT was added to payments.

15 Michael Hartland, the headmaster of Chase Grammar in Staffordshire, which charges fees ranging from £6,915 to £13,779 per year while offering a range of discounted scholarships and bursaries, said: "We have lots of small business owners as our families here, so people who run a fish and chip shop or a cleaning company, a taxi company, driving instructors – they're not the fabulously wealthy.

"This would hit the exact sorts of people that I think Labour really should be supporting. There's a danger that independent schools won't thrive if he adds VAT because inevitably, if parents and families on the margins can no longer afford their fees, it could quite likely lead to a school not being able to keep up the workforce," he said.

20 Directly appealing to Sir Keir to think again, he added: "We want to work with you, and we want to find creative ways that we can work with the maintained system... My worry is this would worsen the provision all round."

Bill Pratt is headmaster of the £15,465-a-year Naima Jewish Preparatory School in London, which educates two-to-11-year-olds and has fewer than 150 pupils. Mr Pratt said pupils would be withdrawn from his school "as sure as night follows day" if Labour pressed ahead with its planned tax raid.

25 "It's bound to happen – I'm not sure how many of our parents will move to the state system, but there's bound to be an effect somewhere," he said. "I don't see how [private schools] can thrive if he makes it so difficult for us. It seems to me that you're trying to dilute the independent sector to make the state system better.

"It's going to be tough. The danger is you make it even more elitist than it is now. It will become the very, very wealthy who go to private schools, and that's not what we're about really."

30 Julie Robinson, chief executive of the Independent Schools Council (ISC), said Sir Keir should find "better ways" to improve education for young people.

"We are glad to hear that Sir Keir Starmer wants independent schools to thrive," Ms Robinson told The Telegraph. "We hope he listens to the very real concerns many school leaders and parents across the country have about the effects of his policy."

35 A survey by the ISC conducted earlier this year found that some private schools face losing more than one-fifth of their pupils if VAT was added to fees.

The Labour Party was contacted for comment.