# Starmer and Conservatives clash over VAT on private school fees



During a contentious session of Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) on Wednesday, Sir Keir Starmer found himself under fire from Conservative frontbencher Victoria Atkins, who fiercely accused him of dishonesty. The disagreement erupted as they discussed a newly introduced government policy imposing VAT on private school fees, a measure purportedly designed to generate extra funding for state schools but likely to hinder educational choices for many families.

Sir Oliver Dowden, a former Conservative minister and current MP for Hertsmere, opened the discussion by pressing Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to rethink the VAT policy's ramifications on private education. Dowden aptly described this initiative as "a double hit to aspiration," highlighting the financial strain it places on parents who make sacrifices to provide the best education for their children. He pointed out that this VAT not only adds to the burden on middle-class families but also fails to resolve the chronic capacity issues in local state schools. “This policy won’t even save money,” he asserted, underlining how the excellent local state schools, which often face overcrowding, stand to gain little from such misguided policies.

In response, Starmer attempted to downplay concerns, claiming, “I don’t doubt the aspirations of all parents… we’ve been able to ensure that our state secondary schools have the teachers they need.” This smacks of hypocrisy, as his party's historical neglect of education funding has left schools starved of resources and staffing. One has to question if Starmer genuinely cares about state education when his party's record tells a different story.

At this heated exchange, Victoria Atkins, now shadow environment secretary, shouted, “that is a lie!” A sharp rebuke that merely reflects the reality many parents face under Labour’s economic policies; her remark led Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle to intervene, reminding everyone of the necessity to uphold parliamentary decorum. Though Atkins later withdrew her statement to avoid further disciplinary action, this moment highlighted the increasing frustration felt towards the Labour government's handling of education.

Adding fuel to the fire, Plaid Cymru’s Westminster leader, Liz Saville Roberts, seized the opportunity to accuse Starmer of further burdening the most vulnerable in society with his financial decisions. She pointed out significant changes in German fiscal policies aimed at boosting investment in defence and infrastructure, questioning whether the UK government would take a similar forward-thinking approach or continue to burden the populace with costly budget cuts impacting welfare and international aid.

The Prime Minister, attempting to defend his government’s commitment to increasing defence spending, emphasized that any proposed funding plans should be meticulously costed. He notably challenged Roberts on her party's previous vote against a crucial £1.6 billion allocation intended for Welsh public services, asking her to clarify how her decision would ultimately benefit her constituents.

This PMQs session starkly illustrated the deepening rift between the parties over educational policies and resource allocation, particularly in light of an administration that threatens to undermine parental choice and working families' rights in pursuit of its flawed economic strategies. The opposition continues to urge for accountability and a return to policies that truly support education and aspiration for all, rather than damaging initiatives that serve to erode opportunities for the very families they claim to represent.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/news/private-schools-in-the-uk-now-include-vat-on-school-fees-heres-why/articleshow/116856926.cms> - This article supports the claim that the UK government has introduced a 20% VAT on private school fees, which is expected to generate additional funding for state schools. It also discusses the potential impact on private school enrollment and the legal challenges to this policy.
* <https://taxscape.deloitte.com/measures-autumn-budget-2024/removal-of-vat-exemption-on-private-school-fees.aspx> - This resource explains the removal of VAT exemption on private school fees, effective from January 2025, and the removal of charitable business rate relief from April 2025. It provides details on how the VAT will apply to education and boarding services.
* <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/vat-private-schools-everything-you-need-to-know/> - This blog post provides comprehensive information on the introduction of VAT on private school fees, including how it will affect fees, state schools, and pupils with special educational needs. It also addresses concerns about fee increases and state school capacity.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education> - Although not directly linked to the specific article, the BBC's education section often covers updates on UK educational policies, including VAT on private schools and state school funding issues, which are central to the discussion in PMQs.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/> - This Parliament UK news section provides updates on recent debates and discussions in Parliament, including those related to educational policies and Prime Minister's Questions. It can offer insights into the political discourse around VAT on private schools.
* <https://www.instituteforfiscalstudies.org.uk/> - The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) often publishes research on education funding and policy changes in the UK. Their work can support claims about the financial implications of VAT on private schools and its potential impact on state education.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/starmer-accused-of-lying-by-tory-frontbencher-during-prime-ministers-questions-AKEXKRZWCFPRVOH7XUXSJIZQ6A/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data