

New policies unveiled to help schools through Coronavirus

26 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have unveiled a raft of new policies for Scottish education which would help support parents, pupils and schools throughout the rest of the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

The plan, "Helping Scottish Schools through the Coronavirus", contains detailed proposals in five key areas which would bridge some worrying gaps that have come to light since schools closed two months ago in an effort to control the virus.

These new policies from the Scottish Conservatives focus on providing parity of learning provision for all pupils, reassurance for parents and aim to ensure that as far as possible, policies to improve Scottish education continue without interruption.

In recent weeks it has become clear that the Scottish Government has taken its eye off the ball with regards to education.

There appears to be no data on the IT capabilities of home learning pupils, we have seen worryingly low attendance of vulnerable children in educational "hubs" and the Scottish Government has delayed a vital review of the curriculum until after next year's Holyrood election.

The Scottish Conservatives are therefore responding to these delays and oversights by presenting a constructive plan to help focus the minds of government on Scottish schools.

The Scottish Conservative plan calls for the Scottish Government to –

- Give equal access to technology for home schooling: the Scottish Government should be clearer about what kinds of ICT should be used to help poorer pupils.
- Help parents by giving them clear and regular evidence on why school closures continue to be necessary, a commitment to reopen schools at the earliest possible date – and childcare support ready for part-time schooling from August.
- Instruct the SQA to publish its method for changing teachers' recommendations for grades, providing transparency for those whose grades are change.
- Continue to measure attainment properly, and stick to original plans to publish the OECD review into Curriculum for Excellence before the May 2021 election.
- Continue teacher recruitment, particularly in rural areas.

Jamie Greene, Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary said:

“The issue of childcare is the principle barrier for most working parents, so plans to continue school closures, even partially, must go in tandem with the provision of childcare.

“No one wants to jeopardise public health, but parents and children are desperate for schools to reopen.

“Families need help to manage this uncertainty; they need updated information about school closures and a reassurance that schools will reopen as soon as it is safe.

“Now more than ever the SNP can ill afford to take their foot off the pedal of vital education reform.

“The Covid-19 crisis has exposed some worrying gaps in Scottish education policy many of which have simply been exacerbated by the lockdown.

“We must start fixing some obvious problems now – we would ensure all children have access to good online resources, effective technology and force the SQA to explain grade changes.

“There is every reason to continue to recruit teachers and measure attainment so that we do not store up problems for the future.

“The Scottish Conservative plan would rebuild and reboot Scottish education for these exceptional times.”

[Sturgeon ‘rowing back’ on contact tracing target](#)

25 May 2020



Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of “rowing back” on her contact tracing target, after suggesting today she wouldn’t need 2000 in place by the end of the month after all.

Speaking BBC Radio Scotland, the First Minister said it wasn’t necessary to have the full number “in the first stages” – which are due to begin next Monday.

That’s despite previously promising to have 2000 in place for the test, trace and isolate scheme to be up and running by June 1.

The system is essential for Scotland to move to the next phases of lifting lockdown.

However, the SNP's approach to testing from the outset of the coronavirus crisis has been riddled with problems.

More than 100,000 tests have been left unused as the daily target falls short on a consistent basis, and care homes are still missing out, despite assurances they would all be given tests.

And today, a top academic has spoken out after his warnings to the SNP about Covid-19 in care homes were ignored.

Prof Richard Ennos, who wrote to health secretary Jeane Freeman at the beginning of the pandemic, said: "Discharging people from hospitals to care homes without testing was incredible."

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"Everyone desperately wants Scotland's plan to exit lockdown quickly and safely to work.

"But it won't happen unless the testing system is up to scratch.

"There's no getting away from the fact Nicola Sturgeon said there would 2000 contact tracers recruited by the end of this month.

"Now she's rowing back on that pledge significantly, and it sounds like she's getting her excuses in early for having significantly fewer.

"The SNP's approach to testing has been botched from the outset, and continued failure on this front will put lives at risk and lead to lockdown lasting longer than is necessary."

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22 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives are demanding that the Housing Minister, Kevin

Stewart 'pulls his finger out' as he continues to refuse to state when housing construction sites will reopen.

Graham Simpson, Scottish Conservative shadow local government and communities secretary has made repeated attempts to find out why the SNP government isn't letting the housing construction industry reopen immediately and when they might.

In the Scottish Parliament yesterday the Housing Minister, Kevin Stewart failed to explain if the new phased approach to easing lockdown meant that housing construction could restart.

Again today, in a letter to Mr Simpson, Mr Stewart has stated that "non-essential construction" must remain closed and he refuses to say when the stages of the phased construction restart plan will begin.

There are currently 6,000 nearly-finished homes that could be completed while observing social distancing measures.

Apart from the financial cost to the companies involved, this unnecessary wait is causing 6,000 families extreme stress and frustration, not to mention financial cost also.

Graham Simpson, Scottish Conservative shadow local government and communities secretary said:

"The Housing Minister has got to pull his finger out.

"Despite repeated questioning he refuses to tell us when housing construction sites can reopen.

"Construction sites have opened in the rest of the UK, they can easily observe social distancing measures, there is no reason they shouldn't be open.

"Not only is the SNP's position completely illogical it is extremely frustrating for 6,000 families waiting to get into their homes.

"The SNP's unnecessary delay on reopening these sites is causing many people unacceptable financial hardship."

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- Sturgeon must tell public now if she's ditched contact tracer target

22 May 2020



The First Minister must tell the public now if the aim to hire 2000 contact tracers by the end of the month has been ditched, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

It comes after her deputy, John Swinney, refused to say whether the target would be hit this morning.

He instead focused on the 600 already in place, and stated that would be sufficient for the test, trace and isolate scheme to launch on June 1.

Now Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw has called on Nicola Sturgeon to be straight with the public, and say now if the target has been dropped.

He said that, given how crucial contact tracing would be to successfully exiting lockdown, people and businesses had a right to know.

On today's Good Morning Scotland, when asked about the 2000 recruitment commitment made earlier this month by the SNP, Mr Swinney said: "600 is the last number that I have available to me.

"That's sufficient contract tracers to get the system up and running, for what we require at the end of this month. I'm sure every effort to increase the numbers, but 600 is a good contingent of numbers to have in place to begin the work on contact tracing."

Last weekend, it emerged more than 3500 people have applied to become contact tracers.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"Given how critical contact tracing is to exiting lockdown, it's vital the First Minister is straight with the public.

"It sounds like John Swinney doesn't think the 2000 target is going to be met, and if that's the case people and businesses need to know.

"The SNP can't row back on this commitment and hope nobody will notice.

"Nicola Sturgeon needs to say how many contact tracers, over and above the 600 Mr Swinney is talking about, have been recruited, and will she have 2000 in place by June 1 like she said.

"If that commitment is going to be broken, when will there be 2000 contact tracers ready and available to work?

"We all want contact tracing to work because it's the only way out lockdown, and we all want to be confident in the system.

“But that will only happen if the SNP is transparent and accountable about what progress is being made.”

Local papers need long term support from SNP

21 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives are asking the SNP government to implement a long term strategy to support local newspapers as they continue to fight for survival.

Fresh from securing the same financial support for these trusted new sources as retail, leisure and the hospitality industry via amendments to the Coronavirus Act, Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative MSP, is now asking the Scottish Government to go further.

The amendments securing the support for regional press were secured despite SNP opposition.

Local press has lost 75 per cent of advertising revenue and 25 per cent of circulation cash, a staggering loss of income that could deal the fatal blow to many of the smaller papers already operating with the tightest of margins.

In the light of these significant cost challenges, and given that journalism has now been recognised as a key industry, the Scottish Conservatives are asking that the SNP draft a plan to make local newspapers sustainable in Scotland for the long-term.

Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:

“It is absolutely right that local newspapers now have access to the same financial support as other sectors of our economy, despite SNP opposition.

“Given the clear majority who recognise the importance of regional media, the Scottish Government must now consider how best to create a sustainable future for this industry.

“A functioning local media is a crucial part of our democracy and is essential for an informed public.

“Prior to the Covid outbreak local papers were already on the brink of survival – their income has now been decimated.

“The Scottish Government must act further than the amendments yesterday and

draft a plan that will support local papers to a vibrant and sustainable future.”