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10 May 2017



Evidence given to Holyrood's education committee today has thrown more doubt

over the effectiveness of Scotland's teacher training programme.

Several teacher trainees spoke to the committee about their experiences of teacher training, and highlighted problems with training for additional support needs (ASN), behaviour management, and most worryingly, literacy.

It comes after figures yesterday revealed that the percentage of S2 pupils who are not meeting the required level of writing increased from 7% to 16% in the last four years.

One trainee said that they received a "single week on literacy – that would be it".

Others said that they received "'next to nothing on classroom behaviour management", and that there was "absolutely nothing on ASN" in their course.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith MSP said:

"The evidence heard this morning has once again laid bare the SNP's terrible record on education.

"With literacy rates plummeting under this SNP Government we now discover that trainee teachers are receiving the bare minimum in training when it comes to improving reading and writing skills.

"This morning's committee evidence made plain the extent of the concerns about some aspects of the teacher training programme.

"Trainees told us that there was virtually no training on additional support needs despite the fact that nearly a quarter of Scottish pupils are requiring that support, and that there has been no support to help children stay safe online.

"There were also concerns over how school placements were organised, something which clearly has had a detrimental effect on the experience of some trainee teachers.

"These are major issues which have a huge impact on our children. Today's evidence sends yet another very blunt message to John Swinney that there are serious issues in Scotland's schools."

£7 billion extra for schools under Liberal Democrat plans

The Liberal Democrats have announced they will invest nearly £7bn more in schools and colleges over the next parliament.

The funding would reverse cuts to frontline school and college budgets, protect per pupil funding in real terms and ensure no school loses out from the National Funding Formula.

Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary Sarah Olney said: "Children are being taught in overcrowded classes by overworked teachers – but Theresa May doesn't care.

"While funding per pupil is set to see the biggest cuts in a generation, billions of pounds are being spent on divisive plans to expand grammars and free schools.

"This extra £7 billion of funding would ensure no school and no child loses out.

"We will reverse crippling Conservative cuts to school budgets and invest to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed."

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "A landslide for the Conservatives would allow Theresa May to take parents across the country for granted and cut our schools to the bone.

"Only the Liberal Democrats can provide the strong opposition Britain needs to stand up for your community.

"Vote for the Liberal Democrats and you can change Britain's future."

The Liberal Democrats will invest £6.9bn more in our schools and colleges over the next parliament, to ensure no school and no child loses out. This goes further than Labour's commitment to reverse £3bn of cuts to school budgets by 2020.

Over the course of the parliament, we will:

- Protect per pupil funding in real terms in schools (£3.3bn)
- Protect further education per pupil funding in real terms (£660m)
- Ensure no school loses out from the National Funding Formula (£1.26bn)
- Protect the pupil premium in real terms (£415m)
- Invest in continuous professional development for teachers (£165m)

The £6.9bn includes £1.1bn of Barnett consequentials for devolved nations.

These plans will be fully costed in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, which will be launched in due course and set all our spending plans out in more detail. This will include reversing the Government's proposed funding for new grammar schools.

China provides update on returned corruption fugitives



An unidentified fugitive returns from Indonesia to China. [Photo/Xinhua]

China Wednesday released an update on the cases of 40 corruption fugitives on the Interpol red list who have either voluntarily returned or been extradited to China, including two spared from prosecution.

As of Monday, 15 returnees had already been sentenced to terms of up to life in prison, according to a statement from the office in charge of fugitive repatriation and asset recovery under the central anti-corruption coordination group.

The cases of another nine fugitives have been accepted by courts, but no sentence has yet been given.

Another 13 cases are still under investigation or awaiting review, including the case of Yang Xiuzhu, the No. 1 most wanted on the red notice list, according to the office.

One case was withdrawn in late 2015 after prosecutors confirmed the death of the suspect, Gu Zhenfang, in Thailand.

Among the 15 fugitives already convicted is Li Huabo, a former local finance official in east China's Jiangxi Province, who was sentenced to life

imprisonment in January.

Li's illicit gains worth 4.83 million yuan (700,000 U.S. dollars) were returned and 5.5 million Singapore dollars (4 million U.S. dollars) was confiscated.

Li, who fled the country in January 2011, remained in Singapore until he was repatriated in May 2015.

In a separate case, Fu Yaobo and Zhang Qingzhao were sentenced to life imprisonment for bribery and embezzlement in August last year.

Zhang Dawei was exempted from criminal prosecution in November 2016 because Zhang had confessed his crime and returned all his illegal gains voluntarily.

Two of the fugitives, Zhu Zhenyu and Zhang Liping, were spared prosecution because Zhu was an accessory to the crime and turned himself in voluntarily, while Zhang's offense involving falsifying value added tax invoices was minor.

The handling of these cases reflects China's policy for the fugitive hunt, namely offering leniency to those who voluntarily return to China while meting out harsh penalties for those who are brought to justice after being arrested, the statement said.

The Interpol red notice of 100 Chinese corruption fugitives was released in April 2015.

As a move to close a loophole in China's renewed anti-corruption drive, which in the past mainly targeted domestic corruption and left out those who have fled the country, China has launched operations such as "Sky Net" and "Fox Hunt" in recent years, focusing mainly on corruption fugitives and assets recovery overseas.

[Lochee Park – former toilets area – grass seeding](#)

Residents will recall that the former toilets in Lochee Park [were finally demolished](#) last November.

I have had a number of enquiries about the state of the site within the park where they were situated – see below :



I contacted Neighbourhood Services at the City Council about this and have now been assured that the area will be prepared and seeded in the coming weeks to add to the grassed area within Lochee Park.