

New policies unveiled to help schools through Coronavirus

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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.”