

Revealed: Scores of schools forced into running combined classes

6 Jun 2019



More than 100 schools in Scotland are being forced to run combined classes where at least three different qualifications are being taught by the same teacher at the same time.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed the extent of multi-level teaching across the country, with some schools even squeezing four separate qualifications into one lesson.

However, when confronted with the problem at First Minister's Questions today, education secretary John Swinney dismissed the issue as a "moan fest".

This is despite a range of experts, including unions and senior teachers, saying combined classes were "intolerable", a "disgrace" and "definitely disadvantaged" children.

The Freedom of Information requests show, out of the 238 schools who responded, 112 had combined classes for three levels, with a further 11 squeezing in four topics.

Included in the examples set out were Inverclyde Academy, where one class is being taught four different levels of maths at the same time, and Bridge of Don Academy in Aberdeen, which has 40 combined classes.

Perth High is teaching three levels in combined classes relating to chemistry, physics and biology.

And Ayr Academy are being forced to teach four different levels of English in one – National 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher.

Despite the scale of analysis revealed, Mr Swinney – who was standing in for Nicola Sturgeon – told Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson that combined classes had always been a feature of Scottish education, and stood by his previous remarks that no-one had told him it was a problem.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Across Scotland, thousands of pupils are being thrown together in combined classes, because the school doesn't have the resources to teach qualifications separately.

"It's unfair on the children who have to compete for the teacher's attention, and unfair on teachers who have to conduct up to four different lessons all at the same time.

“Experts across the board have told the SNP government about the damage and strain this causes, and our data shows the scale of the issue across every part of the country.

“To have John Swinney dismiss legitimate concerns over combined classes as a ‘moan-fest’ is both insulting and offensive.

“And to claim he was better informed than members of the teaching profession who have spoken out, because he attended an award ceremony, is both desperate and laughable.

“I fear Mr Swinney will come to regret such statements which will only infuriate teachers and parents who are having to endure the failures of this government.

“We’ve supplied the evidence and the data, and now the Scottish Government needs to act.

“But it seems after 12 years in government, we have SNP ministers more interested in defending their failed record than actually improving the education of our young people.”