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Changes made to the curriculum have cost Scottish pupils hundreds of thousands of qualifications, Nicola Sturgeon was told today.

Experts said in Holyrood this week that, since 2013, the number of subjects youngsters are able to take has dwindled significantly.

That coincided with the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, and means pupils missed out on taking 622,000 courses, according to Dundee University's Professor Jim Scott, a former headteacher.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson challenged the First Minister on the issue today, demanding to know why her SNP government hadn't acted, despite being told of the problem previously.

However, Ms Sturgeon merely argued that critics were "talking schools down", and dismissed the formal evidence given to the Scottish Parliament's Education Committee.

Just 11 per cent of schools in Scotland offer s4 pupils eight subjects to take.

Indeed, more than half offer just six, a clear restriction of choice.

Of the problem, Prof Scott told MSPs: "I actually struggle to say that in a public forum. It's almost unbelievable."

And the limitations makes it even harder for pupils in poorer areas.

Stirling University's Dr Marina Shapira told the same committee: "The reduction <in subject choice> is larger in schools in higher areas of deprivation and the reduction is larger in schools where there are more children on free school meals."

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The impact of the SNP government's education policy has been more than 600,000 pupils missing out on courses they would have taken otherwise.

"That's a shocking restriction, and does huge harm to their education and

career prospects, especially for those in poorer areas.

“And this is a symptom of a wider malaise – caused by the chaotic introduction of Curriculum for Excellence.

“Under this SNP government we have seen reduced subject choice, teachers left in the dark, the Higher pass rate falling, and attainment in National exams down by a third compared to old Standard Grades.

“But the nationalists show absolutely no sign of listening to the evidence of the experts, teachers or parents.

“The solution is a complete overhaul of the Curriculum for Excellence, and that’s something the SNP has to embark on before any other children miss out.”