

Teachers tell SNP to end combined classes

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Teachers inundated the SNP government with concerns over combined classes, new documents have shown.

On the day after education secretary John Swinney described concerns over multi-level teaching as a “moan-fest”, more than 30 letters to his SNP government have been revealed.

They show the extent of the problem of combined classes – where children studying different qualifications are taught by the same teacher at the same time.

They were submitted to the Scottish Parliament’s Education Committee, before which Mr Swinney appeared last week to say he’d heard no concerns about the matter.

One wrote: “There is much more of a strain on teaching my own subject as due to the now lower numbers mentioned above I have three, sometimes four or five, different levels in one class (N3, N4, N5, Higher, Advanced Higher) which means I cannot meet the needs of the majority of young people in my class.”

Another said: “Options have remained broad at our school by combining levels in many subjects and this has had an impact on the weaker students as they have effectively less taught time. It is not unusual to have classes of N4, N5 and Higher levels combined.”

Others said the practice was now “too common” and that there was “little or no chance of raising attainment or closing attainment gap” as a result.

One teacher even implied combined classes were a ploy to make the SNP government look better, stating: “Increasing pressure to have multi-course teaching at same time to fill a classroom. Again. Pupils getting the short end to make statistics look better.”

At First Minister’s Questions yesterday, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson revealed more than 100 schools in Scotland have examples where three or more qualifications are taught as part of the same class.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“John Swinney arrogantly dismissed concerns about combined classes as a ‘moan-fest’.

“If that’s what he thinks of experts and opposition politicians, is this what he thinks of teachers too?”

“These letters show there is widespread concern about the number of combined classes across Scotland.

“The problem disadvantages children, harms their education and stretches teachers in too many directions.

“It’s simply not good for the SNP government to ignore these points and plough on regardless.”