

Figures show SNP's 'shameful' performance on education

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9 May 2017



New figures released today have shown that reading and writing standards among pupils in Scotland have fallen to 'shameful' levels.

The latest Scottish Survey for Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) showed a rise in the percentage of pupils who are functionally illiterate from 7% to 16% in the last four years.

Fewer than half of S2 pupils in Scotland were performing well in writing, down from 64% in 2012.

The figures also showed that Scotland's attainment gap continues to exist, with pupils from the least deprived areas outperforming those from the most deprived areas at all stages – with the gap similar to that seen in 2012.

Despite the findings in the SSLN, the SNP Government are still planning to cancel all future reports.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith MSP said:

"These are shameful results which show that over its ten years in office this SNP government has failed a generation.

"Performance in writing still seems to be the biggest problem, including the fact that there appears to be a disparity between pupils' views of how they are performing in writing and listening and how they are actually performing.

"Given this evidence, it is abundantly clear that the Scottish Government is not doing enough to address the problems in basic literacy that this data highlights.

"It also shows that a very persistent gap between pupils from the most deprived areas and the least deprived areas continues, and that needs to be tackled.

"The SSLN evidence is a central piece of evidence, produced by the Scottish Government, which gives us important information as to how children are performing.

"These figures also show why it is so essential that there is a strong data

base, particularly since the Scottish Government has decided to discontinue the SSLN and has removed Scotland from TIMSS and PIRLS.”

Some of the statistics included in the SSLN include:

- At P4 level, since 2012 the percentage of children being able to read well or very well has fallen by 5 per cent, and for writing, it has fallen by 2 per cent.
- At P7 level, since 2012 the percentage of children being able to read well or very well has fallen by 2 per cent, and for writing, it has fallen by 7 per cent.
- At S2 level, there was a slight increase of 2 per cent from 2014, but no improvement on 2012 figures. Worryingly S2 pupils who can write well or very well has dramatically fallen from 65 per cent in 2012 to 49 per cent in 2016.

The percentage of children in S2 who are not at the required level in writing has more doubled in 4 years from 7 per cent in 2012 to 16 per cent in 2016.

[Evidence of 'desperate' Yes alliance in Moray after pointless Greens sit out election](#)

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- Evidence of 'desperate' Yes alliance in Moray after pointless Greens sit out election

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The alliance of pro-independence parties has been accused of desperation, after the Greens confirmed they wouldn't bother fighting the General Election in a key Scottish seat.

The party – which has been ordered by the SNP to stand aside in close constituencies – won't field a candidate in Moray, the seat currently held by Angus Robertson.

Projections show the SNP deputy leader could lose the seat to Scottish Conservative candidate Douglas Ross, with the recent council election suggesting the nationalists are trailing in second place.

Last week, SNP MP Tommy Sheppard urged the Greens to step aside or risk splitting the pro-independence vote.

Now the Greens appear to have bowed down to that request by confirming no candidate will stand.

Scottish Conservative Moray candidate Douglas Ross said:

“This decision by the Greens smacks of desperation; they will do anything to prop up the SNP and hang on their shirt tails.

“People will find it hard to believe them when they say they won’t be backing any particular candidate.

“When it comes down to it they will be backing the SNP all the way as we see time and again in the Scottish Parliament.

“The SNP has successfully bossed the Greens about – and that shows just how worried the party is about losing the seat in Moray.

“While the local Greens have tried to justify why they are not standing, this announcement comes just two weeks after the SNP’s Tommy Sheppard asked them not to stand and split the pro-Yes vote.

“If you don’t want another independence referendum, this is your only chance to make that clear. Only a vote for the Scottish Conservatives on June 8 can send a clear message to the SNP in Moray.

“Here in Moray, we will be running a positive campaign so people know what we stand for, rather than running in support of another negative and divisive independence referendum.”

Confirmation of the Greens’ decision is here:

<http://www.insidemoray.com/ross-attacks-green-decision-not-to-run-for-westminster-seat/>

[Ruth: We can use general election to “bring the SNP down to size”](#)

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- Ruth: We can use general election to “bring the SNP down to size”



Ruth Davidson has launched the Scottish Conservative General Election campaign in Edinburgh.

At the launch she will say that voters can use their vote to bring the SNP down to size, with the Scottish Conservatives the only party capable of leading the fightback against the nationalists.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“I’m setting everybody a challenge today.

“Just as we doubled our numbers of MSPs last year, and doubled our number of councillors last week, we now we have to double our efforts over these next four and a half weeks.

“Because we have a massive fight on our hands against an all-powerful SNP.

“We go into this election with one seat. They go into with 54 – and most of them with large majorities.

“Even to challenge the Nationalists in some of these seats is going to take a Herculean effort.

“Make no mistake – we are the underdogs going into this campaign.

“But we also know this.

“The SNP is not Scotland.

“And people across this country don’t take kindly to Nicola Sturgeon pretending the opposite is true.

“Across Scotland, it’s a two-horse race.

“And across Scotland, we also know people are looking for somebody to stand up to the SNP.

“So our challenge is this

“It’s to bring the SNP down to size.

“To show they can’t take Scotland for granted.

“To show that we, the Scottish Conservatives, can lead Scotland’s fightback against the SNP.”

Sturgeon under pressure as 'systematic' spending in election periods revealed

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- Sturgeon under pressure as 'systematic' spending in election periods revealed

8 May 2017



Ross Thomson is calling on Nicola Sturgeon to come clean about the sustained spending announcements made during previous general election campaigns.

The Conservative MSP has written again to Leslie Evans, the Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, calling on her to publish her investigation into the £8million investment into Glasgow and demanding a full investigation into what appears to be a systematic approach to spending announcements in previous election periods.

On Friday, the Permanent Secretary dismissed a complaint about the announcement of £8.35million development funding for Glasgow, which had been made just 48 hours before voters went to the polls in the council election.

She insisted the Scottish Government's reputation was 'unblemished'.

Announcements in previous election campaigns include:

- Over £300m of government funding announced in two separate tranches to keep energy bills low. These were made during the general election campaign period, when the Labour Party was explicitly campaigning on a pledge to freeze energy bills and made the cost of living a central plank of their general election campaign.
- Nearly £2m for community groups across Scotland – with several projects singled out in the Government press release in target seats: Gordon, Glasgow North East Kircaldy and Cowdenbeath, and Stirling.

In his letter to the Permanent Secretary, Ross Thomson argues:

- Leslie Evans' investigation into the Glasgow announcement needs to be published.
- The circumstances surrounding the 16 other announcements in previous election campaigns need to be investigated in full, and the content of that investigation also need to be published.
- The concern is not that the Civil Service 'designed' policy to influence election campaigns. The concern is that the Scottish Government, both its

elected politicians and impartial Civil Servants, undertook activity which did 'call into question' their impartiality.

Scottish Conservative MSP for the North East, Ross Thomson said:

"When voters elect a government, they put their trust in the Government of the day.

"They trust that public money will be spent properly and they trust that the Civil Service supporting the government will be, and will be seen to be, completely impartial.

"I am now afraid that trust is being undermined.

"The First Minister needs to stop hiding from the issue.

"She needs to explain to the electorate why the SNP government has made spending announcement after spending announcement in communities across Scotland when the same communities are being asked to vote for her party.

"And the Civil Service need to protect their reputation for impartiality. They need to publish their investigation into the Glasgow spending announcement, they need to investigate what appear to be systematic and targeted spending announcements in recent elections, and they need to publish these findings in full too.

"Unless and until this happens, this scandal will grow – and voters across Scotland will rightly ask why they should put their trust in the SNP again".

You can read a copy of Ross' letter [here](#).

Local elections 2017 – three week campaign

- **£1m to individual crofters.** 'Over £948,000 has been awarded to help crofters in some of Scotland's most rural and remote communities benefit from better housing. 29 crofters will share the funding which enables them to build or improve homes, helping to retain and attract people to rural communities' (*Scottish Government press release*, 25 April 2017, [link](#)).
- **£1m for Seafood Scotland.** 'Raising the awareness and enhancing the global profile of the Scottish seafood industry will assist the sector as a whole...This is just one example of why EU funding is so important...Our fishing industry is a vital part of the rural economy' (*Scottish Government press release*, 26 April 2017, [link](#)).

This announcement came just a day after the SNP was plunged into a row when two SNP MPs contradicted SNP policy to take fishermen back into the CFP by signing a pledge committing to keep them out (*Courier*, 25 April 2017, [link](#)).

In relation to the role that Marine Scotland plays in this allocation, I would again note this section of the guidance: 'National devolved public bodies spend public money and make public announcements, use Scottish

Government property and can employ civil servants. This guidance therefore also applies to their activities’.

- **Progress report into infrastructure spend across Scotland.** ‘Significant progress continues to be made in delivering our infrastructure investment plan, which is good for jobs, good for the economy, and good for Scotland’ (Scottish Government press release, 26 April 2017, [link](#)).

The report provides updates on projects across Scotland: 9 specific major road infrastructure projects, 5 specific ferry projects, 4 specific rail projects, 5 specific completed NHS projects, 4 specific ongoing NHS projects, and 18 specific completed schools (*Progress Report*, Scottish Government, 26 April 2017, [link](#)). The First Minister’s Chief of Staff herself promoted the report on social media, tweeting the figures for the North East to the SNP’s political account and the Press and Journal. I would note that the guidance states: ‘national announcements by the Scottish Government may have a particular impact on local areas, for example, the publication of policy statements which have a specific local dimension’.

- These are in addition to the announcement of 2 May 2017 in Glasgow.

General Election 2015 – six week campaign

- **£1.9m for community groups across Scotland.** The Scottish Government minister is quoted in the release saying: ‘I know that the projects announced today will make a real and lasting difference at a local level’ (Scottish Government press release, 2 April 2015, [link](#)).

Investment singled out by the Scottish Government in the release include target seats: Ellon in the Gordon constituency, Lambhill Stables in the Glasgow North East constituency, support for Greener Kirkcaldy in the seat of the former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s seat, and nearly £150,000 for a community enterprise in the Stirling constituency.

- **Over £100m to ‘fight fuel poverty’.** The release states: ‘Scotland’s most vulnerable households will receive help to make their homes warmer and cheaper to heat thanks to a £103 million investment to tackle fuel poverty’. It goes on to break the full amount down by local area (Scottish Government press release, 3 April 2015, [link](#)).

This announcement was made during a campaign when the Labour party were explicitly campaigning across the UK on a pledge to freeze energy bills.

- **£224m for ‘tackling fuel poverty’.** Margaret Burgess, the Housing Minister, states: ‘By making sure people in the islands and in more rural parts of the country, have the same chances to make their homes, warmer, cheaper and easier to heat, we are tackling the inequalities that exist in our country’ (Scottish Government press release, 22 April 2015, [link](#)).

This announcement was, again, made during a campaign when the Labour party were explicitly campaigning across the UK on a pledge to freeze energy bills – and less than three weeks after the £100m announcement also on fuel poverty

- **£840,000 for trade union members.** The First Minister herself made this announcement, stating: 'I want to see every person in Scotland given the opportunity to get on in life and improve on the skills they already possess, and investing in our workforce is an important part of this' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 21 April 2015, [link](#)).
- **£120,000 in local announcements to support veterans.** Keith Brown commented: 'The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that no member of the armed forces, service family member or veteran in Scotland faces disadvantage when accessing services and support' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 30 April 2015, [link](#)).

The location of announcements include Edinburgh, Dundee, Ayrshire, Glasgow, Renfrewshire and the Scottish Borders. **European Elections 2014 – three week campaign**

- **£6.5m for new quayside at Nigg Energy Park.** First Minister Alex Salmond announced the funding on a visit to Nigg Energy Park (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 2 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.1m in CashBack funding.** 'The Scottish Government has today announced that more than £2 million is to be invested to create life-changing opportunities for vulnerable young people' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 6 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.25m for 29 schools of rugby across Scotland.** The Scottish Government release specifically identifies Ayrshire as benefitting: 'One region in particular that has benefited from CashBack funding is Ayrshire, which now has over 3,600 registered players in clubs and schools across Ayr, Cumnock, Carrick, Marr, Kilmarnock, Irvine, Ardrossan and Garnock' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 7 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **170 new homes in 4 areas.** Housing Minister, Margaret Burgess, welcomed the announcement by advocating: 'will deliver over 170 brand new and affordable homes to rent in Rosyth, Aberdeen, Inverness and Ardersier'.

She also used the Government press release to criticise the Westminster Government: 'Despite Westminster's cuts to our capital budget the Scottish Government is doing everything possible to stimulate growth, maximise our investment in housing and deliver on our target of 30,000 new, affordable homes over the lifetime of this Parliament' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 8 May 2014, [link](#)).

- **£15m for Green Homes Cashback Scheme.** This announcement was used to make the case for Scottish Independence – during the period leading up to the European elections and in the same year as the Independence referendum. The Minister for Energy, Fergus Ewing, is quoted in the release: 'This new phase of Green Homes Cashback underlines our ongoing commitment to energy efficiency – we are doing all we can under existing arrangements to provide practical support to households. What's clear however is that we need the full powers of independence' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 9 May 2014, [link](#)).
- **£2.1m to 28 specific organisations to help communities across Scotland.** The announcement states: 'Enterprising third sector organisations will benefit from a further £2.1 million in grants to help them deliver services to vulnerable people in communities across Scotland. The cash,

spread between 28 organisations, will be awarded through the Enterprise Ready Fund' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 13 May 2014, [link](#)).

- **£40m for affordable housing.** Nicola Sturgeon, then Deputy First Minister, announced £40m more for the Help to Buy scheme, stating: 'This additional £40 million funding will allow more people in Scotland to buy their first home and continue to make it easier for 'second-steppers' and others to move to a new property' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 16 May 2014, [link](#)).
 - **£3.5m for 4 projects in Islay, Edinburgh, Fintry and Inverness.** The Energy Minister welcomed the announcement by stating: 'This latest round of Scottish Enterprise funding underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland's growing renewables sector' (*Scottish Government Press Release*, 21 May 2014, [link](#)).
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[Ruth takes fightback to Gordon constituency](#)

6 May 2017



Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson is in Inverurie today to take the party's fightback to the Gordon constituency.

The party's strong result in the local government elections yesterday included beating the SNP in Gordon, meaning it is a two horse race for the seat in June's General Election.

Similarly good results in seats such as Aberdeen South, Moray, Stirling and Edinburgh South West have meant that many voters across Scotland will face a clear choice between the Scottish Conservatives and the SNP on June 8th.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"This week's local government election has shown we are the only party in Scotland with the strength to fight back against the SNP – in every part of Scotland.

"We won the local government election in Gordon this week, beating the SNP into second place. It means that in this seat, as in many others, it is a two horse race between us and the Nationalists.

"As is the case right across Scotland, the choice in Gordon is clear.

"It's between a Scottish National Party that will take us back to more division and instability, and a Scottish Conservative party that will fight against another referendum so we can all move on together."