

Scottish schools can be the best in the world

19 August 2017



We think Scottish schools can be the best in the world. Here's our plan to do it.

- Use the powers of the Scottish Parliament to stop the cuts and invest in education
- An independent review of teachers' pay, conditions and career structure to re-establish the profession as world leading, and attract new teachers to it.
- A commitment to urgently commission the design of a systematic focused literacy and numeracy programme as recommended by the government's international advisers.
- Halt the centralisation of schools through regional directors and maintain local budgeting.
- Re-establish an independent inspectorate and immediately task the Chief Inspector with producing an improvement plan for curriculum for excellence, from primary one to sixth year of high school.
- An expert group to plan reform of the senior phase of school, increasing vocational strands for example through skills academies and Further Education partnerships.
- Introduce a Scottish Graduation Certificate for all at 18, reflecting achievement in exam, vocational, work experience and voluntary learning.
- Bursaries for teacher training in shortage subjects, beginning with Mathematics and Physics.
- Establish a Breakfast club in every school.
- Establish a Homelink worker and mental health counsellor in every secondary school cluster.

- End charging for exam appeals.

This week, our summer campaign 'For The Many' has been focused on education as the schools go back. Find out more about the campaign by clicking the image below:



[The briefing: school uniform grants](#)

18 August 2017



We think there should be a minimum rate for school uniform grants across the country – but councils shouldn't have to make even more cuts to their budgets to fund them.

What are school uniform grants?

These grants to help low income families cover the cost of school uniform and essential items such as school bags, shoes and PE equipment.

The problem is they vary widely from local authority. You can find out what your own local authority pays [here](#).

How much should they be?

John Swinney said they should be around £70, but research from the Poverty Truth Commission said £129.50 would be a better amount.

Ensuring a consistent school uniform grant to all the poorest families would cost £13 million.

Council budgets have been hammered by £1.5 billion of SNP cuts since 2011. We think the SNP should stump up fresh cash to pay for a minimum rate.

As Scotland's pupils go back to school, Scottish Labour's summer campaign, For The Many, is this week focused on education.

To read more about our summer campaign, click the image below:



[It's time to scrap charges on exam appeals](#)

17th August 2017

It's time to scrap charges on exam appeals



**Labour would
SCRAP
unfair exam appeal charges**

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Scottish Labour

What are exam appeal charges?

In 2014 the SNP Government introduced a fee if an appeal, or an exam 'review', is carried out but no change is made to the grade awarded.

Before then, appeal costs were met centrally. Now, they come out of school budgets – already being hammered by SNP cuts.

What happened next?

Appeal rates for state schools fell through the floor. Now a private school pupil is three times more likely to appeal a grade than a state school pupil.

Why does this matter?

We want more pupils from poorer backgrounds to be able to go on to university. For many people an appeal can be the difference between getting

on to university and not.

These charges are a financial barrier to going on to university. That's why Iain Gray, Labour's Education spokesperson, has written to John Swinney calling on him to end these charges,

Here's his letter:

Dear John

Exam appeal charges

All across Scotland, pupils will be weighing up whether to appeal a grade from their exams, with their results having come through last week.

The most recent available data shows that private schools are three times more likely to appeal their grade than state school pupils.

These charges for exam appeals are unfair and should be scrapped, all they have done since your government introduced them is tilt the education system towards those who can afford to pay and those who cannot.

The cost of these charges now fall on school budgets. State schools have already seen huge cuts during this government's time in office, with £1.5 billion slashed from local authority budgets since 2011.

Labour and the SNP agree that there should not be any financial barriers to going on to study after school, so we should work together to remove these charges.

We should be taking every step possible to widen access to university and college. These charges, which the data shows have a deterring effect on state school pupils applying for appeals, stand in the way of that aspiration.

Sincerely,

Iain Gray
Labour Education spokesperson

As Scotland's pupils go back to school, Scottish Labour's summer campaign, For The Many, is this week focused on education.

To read more about the campaign, click on the image below:



Every young person deserves the opportunity to succeed

16 August 2017



Today we are calling for the Scottish Government to set up an independent expert review into the senior phase of school.

What does that mean? We want to see if Third to Sixth year is working properly for everyone.

The review should focus on 5 things:

1. The impact of 4,000 fewer teachers on pupil choice.
2. Access for pupils to subjects, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects.
3. Access of each secondary school to regional colleges and local employers.
4. An update on access to vocational courses as the curriculum has narrowed.
5. The possibility of introducing a Scottish Graduation Certificate as a formal qualification.

Why do we need a review?

With fewer teachers in our schools, the curriculum is narrowing.

That means students studying fewer subjects.

Government guidance published two years ago encourages schools to link with local colleges and employers to allow pupils to pursue vocational courses and Highers.

But there has been no update on these partnerships, if every school has one, and whether they have helped pupils

In those two years Scotland has seen a decrease in the number of pupils sitting Modern Languages and STEM subjects.

We are concerned that pupils aren't able to access key subjects, particularly at the same time, to get the qualifications they want to go college or university.

The review should consider introducing a Scottish Graduation Certificate

Labour's plan for a Scottish Graduation Certificate would be a qualification gained at the senior phase of secondary school and would involve vocational courses, work experience, voluntary achievement and traditional exams.

It would build on the successful Scottish awards network and mean formal recognition for young people with fewer traditional qualifications. The Scottish Graduation Certificate would also be a step towards an education system that recognises all talents.

We think every young person deserves the opportunity to succeed.

This week, Labour's summer campaign 'For The Many' turns to education. Catch up with the summer campaign in full here:



[Education must be the top priority](#)

15 August 2017

This week marks two years since I became Scottish Labour leader. Three elections, a referendum on the EU and the near constant campaign around the constitution in Scotland has been packed into that time – now it's time to take a breath and focus on what really matters.

I made education my top priority when I became Labour leader because I believe the transformative power it can have on people's lives. Giving people the skills they need to compete for the jobs of the future will cut the levels of poverty that scar our communities and grow our economy.

One of the first headline policies I announced as leader was a Fair Start Fund – extra funding for each of the poorest pupils in our primary schools, paid directly to head teachers.

Sound familiar? The SNP adopted the policy and rebranded it the ‘pupil equity fund’.

I’m all for the SNP government taking Labour’s advice when it comes to closing the gap between the richest and the rest. The problem is SNP ministers copied our policy – but not how to pay for it.

Labour would introduce a 50p top rate of tax on the richest to fund this extra investment in our young people – instead the SNP took it from central funding.

That is central funding for schools that has already been hammered by £1.5 billion of cuts since 2011. It is the definition of giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

The Scottish Parliament has the powers to do things differently now. Thanks to the new powers over tax delivered by the Vow there is no excuse for the Scottish Government to fail to give our schools the investment they need.

This week Labour’s summer campaign, For The Many, adopts a ‘Back to school’ theme, as we highlight our plans to reform and increase investment in education. We’ll highlight the SNP’s failures too.

It’s more than two years since Nicola Sturgeon took to the pages of the Daily Record to declare she had a ‘sacred responsibility to ensure every young person has the same chance to succeed’.

Big words, but the numbers don’t add up. The percentage of spending going to education and skills since the SNP has come to office has fallen, as it has pushed down the list of priorities for public spending.

In fact the SNP currently plan to spend more money cutting tax for frequent flyers than they plan to spend closing the attainment gap in our classrooms.

In 2016 the SNP lost its majority in the Scottish Parliament, and in 2017 it lost its direction.

Ministers can’t bulldoze their plans through parliament anymore. They have to work with other parties.

That’s why, I’ll be making the case in parliament to push Labour ideas through on education.

Nicola Sturgeon promised Scots she was going to make education her top priority. I’m going to make her keep that promise.

Kez Dugdale is the Scottish Labour leader. This article first appeared in the Daily Record on 15 August 2017.

