Restore our Schools

September 2020

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Foreword

Five years ago, Nicola Sturgeon said that she would be judged on her education record and that it was her "number one priority".

Instead, under the SNP, we have seen teacher numbers in decline, their flagship Education Bill abandoned and the SQA grading pupils on the basis of a postcode lottery.

Any one of these failings would be seen as a major dereliction of duty, worthy of a reappraisal of the government's approach to schooling. Combined, they show an administration that is content to manage a steady decline instead of restoring excellence.

This is not the attitude of a government that treats education as its priority.

In the face of this SNP Government's disregard, it is more important than ever that our school system is given the attention and support that it deserves. That is why my party has published 'Restore our schools', to set out the ideas and policies we need to support our teachers and pupils, as we look to make Scottish education the best in the world again.

Ideas such as free school meals and a teacher workforce strategy are not revolutionary but crucially, we can get on with delivering them now. Any one of the policies presented in this paper could be taken forward by this SNP Government right now if it had the will to do so.

But that work can only happen if we seize the opportunity presented by the current crisis to move our politics forward. The public are sick of seeing their politicians argue over the divisions of the past when they should be working together to manage the pandemic and then rebuild Scotland afterwards.

The work of rebuilding our country must start with restoring our schools. Every child deserves the opportunity to go to a local school that is in a good condition and has enough teachers so they can study the subjects they want to take. That is the cornerstone of what this paper attempts to achieve.

Far too many pupils attend schools that are in 'Poor' or 'Bad' condition, do not have enough teachers or do not offer a breadth of subject choice. We must also stop students from deprived backgrounds being overlooked by uncaring algorithms and prevented from getting the support they deserve.

So, let's work together to leave the old divisions behind and get on with the job of restoring excellence in our schools.

Douglas Ross
Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

Introduction

Scottish education used to be the best in the world but is now considered just average in international comparisons. This must be considered one of the greatest failings of the SNP's 13 years in government.

Nicola Sturgeon described education as her "number one priority". Yet there are almost 3,000 fewer teachers in our schools than when the SNP came into power, their flagship Education Bill and Named Persons policies have been scrapped, and they have caused the biggest exam fiasco since devolution. The practical effects of this has been that teachers are overworked and overburdened by bureaucracy, and results have now reached record lows according to international assessors.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that restoring excellence in Scottish schooling should be a key aim for the Scottish Government as we look to rebuild our country from the devastating impact of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. We recognise that equipping our children with the skills they need to succeed in a changing global economy is the best way to ensure that Scotland is prosperous in the future.

Our approach will focus on supporting professionals through a proper workforce strategy to restore numbers, which will ensure that our teachers can get on with the job of educating our children. We would target government support for attainment to those who need it most, regardless of the school they go to or where they live. In addition, we would promote STEM education and improve the recognition of vocational options by the SQA. Finally, we must face the hard truths and re-enter Scottish education into international comparisons, so that declining performance is recognised and tackled.

The SNP are content with an underperforming school system that is failing our children. The Scottish Conservatives have the fresh ideas to restore our reputation as having the best schools in the world and to deliver excellence in education.

This paper is the second in a series of policy papers setting out the approaches, ideas and values that the Scottish Conservatives will champion in the Scottish Parliament going forward. The positions presented in this paper will inform the approach taken in our Manifesto for next year's Scottish Parliament Election but any one of them could be delivered by the SNP Government right now.

Key Policies

- **Invest in a clear workforce strategy to recruit 3,000 teachers.** We would restore teacher numbers by investing £550 million to recruit 3,000 teachers over the next Parliament.

- **Allow every primary school child to access a free school lunch and breakfast.** We would allow primary school pupils in P4 to P7 to join those in P1-3 in being able to get a free school lunch and would allow all primary school pupils to get a free breakfast.

- **Introduce a national tutoring programme.** We would allow schools to access high quality tutors, to give extra support to pupils who have fallen behind their peers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Invest in our schools through fair funding to councils.** We would commit to no pupil going to a school in 'Bad' or 'Poor' condition by the end of the next Parliament.

- **Establish an independent school and education inspector.** We would establish a new body for inspecting schools and the performance of our education system that would report to the Scottish Parliament.

Investing in a workforce strategy to recruit more teachers

There is no greater challenge facing our education system right now than our overworked and overburdened teachers. Since the SNP came to power, teacher numbers have plummeted and as a result there are almost 3,000 fewer teachers than in 2007.

We know the damage that a lack of teachers can do to our education system. Less teachers means larger class sizes and individual pupils not being given the attention that they deserve. This can be especially damaging for children who have additional support needs. It also means teachers having to cover classes or subjects in which they do not have a specialism. This can result in different ages, abilities and even subjects being taught in the same classroom. A lack of teachers hurts pupils of all abilities and can only be detrimental to our schools as a whole. Conversely, having more teachers will do more for the quality of local schools than any reform agenda.

The problem of a lack of teachers is not spread evenly across the country. In rural or remote communities, there is a clear difficulty in attracting qualified teachers to take up positions. In the most extreme case this can force school closures, such as in the case of Argyll and Bute Council having to mothball Minard Primary School.

It is also not spread evenly across subject areas. We know that there are particularly acute shortages of STEM teachers, in home economics, languages and Gaelic[1]. This may be one explanation for why performances in mathematics and science in Scotland is declining in international comparisons.

However, increasing teacher numbers is not just a question of recruitment but also one of retention. Where teaching posts are filled, we need to ensure that those teachers have meaningful development and a clear and obvious progression structure that rewards them for continuing to do their jobs. Crucially we should incentivise teachers to stay within their communities and not feel that they have to move to advance their careers. That is why we welcome the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers and believe that they should be taken on board.

While we welcomed the Scottish Government's decision to take forward our policy of bursaries for STEM professionals to move into teaching and also to look at pilot programmes for Alternative Routes into Teaching, it is clear that more needs to be done to attract the best and brightest to the profession. To put this into context, the two schemes have just £4 million of funding attached to them this year.[2] We need to show more ambition to boost teacher numbers.

What Scotland needs is a proper teacher workforce strategy to set clear targets for teacher recruitment with the funding and imagination to achieve this ambition. This will ensure that we are recruiting enough teachers in the right areas to grow numbers. Increasing recruitment will help with retention as the pressure is eased on the existing workforce. To restore teacher numbers the Scottish Conservatives would:

Invest in a clear workforce strategy to recruit 3,000 teachers
The SNP's cuts to teacher numbers have undermined the profession. We need to be ambitious, to reduce demands on the existing teaching workforce, and to ensure that our children receive the teaching time and standard that they deserve. Any workforce plan should also focus on teaching staff.[3]

Therefore, over the next five years we would aim to eliminate the shortfall that has been created from 2007, meaning recruiting an average of 600 additional teachers each year and 3,000

teachers by the end of the next Parliament. Based on the Scottish Governments own figures, we expect that recruiting and retaining 3,000 additional teachers would cost £550 million over the lifetime of the Parliament.

Increasing support for career switchers into education

We believe that the entry into teaching of individuals with experience of having worked in their field of expertise can be of great benefit to pupils. The Scottish Government currently operates a bursary scheme for STEM teaching applicants that have worked for at least three years. They receive a £20,000 bursary and the cost of their fees for studying education. However, the scheme's budget is only £3 million and has only 150 places. [4]

It also only covers students in STEM subjects and Home Economics. However, our schools are facing significant shortages in Modern Languages, English and Gaelic teachers. We believe therefore that the scheme should be expanded to all subject areas with a significant increase in places, under the same conditions. We would retain the focus on shortage subjects by ensuring that they are given priority places on the scheme.

A new campaign encouraging people to take up teaching

As part of encouraging the best and brightest to take up teaching as a career we believe that the Scottish Government should fund a new communications campaign encouraging not just graduates but career switchers to become teachers.

Helping every child who needs help, regardless of where they live

As the recent exam fiasco has shown, the SNP Government measures poverty and disadvantage in our school system in broad brushes. They prefer to label whole streets, schools and communities as being disadvantaged rather than looking at the individual family circumstances and the performance of the pupil. This results in a clunky system for directing government intervention where, at best, money meant for helping disadvantaged children does not always go to those who need it. At worst, it can see pupils being held back from achieving their potential or being unfairly rewarded because they come from a poorer or wealthier background, as we saw with the SQA results last month. While the SNP were forced into righting that wrong, they have not addressed the system that caused it to happen in the first place.

Social inclusion is the greatest strength of our education system. The fact that pupils from the same catchment area, for the most part, go to their local school and play, grow up and learn together, regardless of wealth or ability, is how we build a cohesive, well rounded Scottish society.

However, this means that it can be too easy to label a catchment area or a significant part of it as deprived and then channel additional funding to a local authority or school to help the pupils there. As Professor Lindsay Paterson, of the University of Edinburgh, and others have detailed, this can lead to poor pupils from wealthy streets or estates missing out on funding and additional support that they should have been entitled to.

It is also the case that pupils, especially those that are younger, have been reliant on parental tutoring over this pandemic. Survey data shows that there are a significant number of pupils that will have not engaged with or been unable to access online learning materials over this time, while others will have been encouraged and able to do so. We cannot assume that this can be accounted for on the basis of deprivation and so we need to be especially vigilant in our schools for those who need additional support following this pandemic.

All of this shows the need for us to move to an approach where we are identifying the needs of individual pupils and also delivering broad support, so that pupils who need it can benefit from government interventions. To give pupils from deprived backgrounds the best chance to succeed wherever they live we would:

Allow every primary school child to have access to a free school lunch and breakfast
Innumerable studies have shown the importance of children being properly fed to their educational attainment. It is currently the case that all school pupils from P1 to P3 are able to receive free school lunches, as are those whose families are in receipt of Universal Credit or a range of other benefits. However, we consider these qualifications as being too limited. Many pupils still suffer the effects of deprivation, despite their families not being in receipt of the relevant benefits.

As such, we believe that the provision of free school lunches should be extended to all primary school pupils. The policy rationale is clear and has already been accepted by the Scottish Government in its provision of free lunches to pupils in P1-3. This would also help to remove the sigma that stops some pupils from claiming the free school lunches that they are entitled to.

53.6 per cent of pupils were registered for free lunches in primary school, of whom 76.9 per cent took a school lunch. In total, 58.6 per cent of pupils received or paid for a school lunch. If the uptake continued to be 76.9 per cent, we estimate that extending the provision to all

primary school children would cost around an additional £105 million, though it is likely that actual uptake will be markedly less. If the uptake was all pupils who currently pay for a school lunch, then we estimate that it would cost around an additional £55 million.[5]

However, much of the school day takes place before lunch. If we believe that well-fed children engage better with schooling, then we cannot ignore those that do not get a breakfast before school. There is currently no statutory obligation for schools to provide them, leaving councils and charities to fill the gap out of their own budgets. Analysis from Kellogs in 2014 found that 28 per cent of schools in Scotland did not have a breakfast club.[6]

We estimate that the cost of providing a free breakfast for every primary school child in Scotland would be around £20 million annually, though again it is likely that actual uptake and costs will be lower.[7]

Introducing a national tutoring programme
As we have noted, there is a real possibility that some pupils have been unable or not encouraged to access online learning tools during the lockdown. It is essential that we are able to deliver targeted interventions to those specific pupils and give them the support that they need to get back on track with their learning.

As such, we would introduce a national tutoring programme, to access support from supply teachers, student teachers and other individuals who meet the right standards to give extra attention and support to those pupils. Schools would be able to identify and bid for funding for out of school programmes or on an approved list of tutors to give these pupils additional teaching hours. The Scottish Government would work with councils to establish an approved list for each local authority area. This would be funded from the Barnett Consequentials from the similar UK Government scheme which had a budget of £350 million. [8]

Moving beyond algorithms in delivering additional support
As stated previously, we need to target our support towards those children who need it most. This should be a goal that unites all education

professionals and all political parties. While the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is an important tool for identifying poverty in broad strokes, it should be used as a starting point rather than as a complete picture.

A new way of measurement could be achieved by building a more complete picture of a child's social circumstances, such as the work and educational history of their parents. We believe that the Scottish Government should engage with education experts, professionals and the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee to develop a more nuanced system for gathering and assessing deprivation among Scottish schoolchildren. This would then inform allocations of funding for raising the performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the Attainment Fund.

Giving our children the skills they need to succeed in a modern economy

The modern Scottish economy is changing and the priorities that our schools have in educating our children must adapt to meet them. Careers in social media management and app development, which would have been relatively unheard of a decade ago, are now employing a growing share of the Scottish workforce.

For years there was a clear hierarchy of university education being seen to be the pinnacle of achievement for aspiring learners and sending pupils to a 'good university' was the measure of success for a school. Thankfully, we have moved on from that mindset and, while university continues to have an important role as the next stage of progression for many children when they leave school, it is now widely recognised that vocational options can lead to a successful career path.

However, in many cases our school system and the subjects that we study are still to catch up with our modern economy. Under the SNP, there is clear evidence that subject choice is being constrained, especially for pupils from deprived backgrounds.

It is essential that our schools equip our children with a skillset that is directly relevant to the current employment opportunities in the Scottish economy. To drive schooling that aligns with a dynamic modern economy we would:

Encourage school clusters, to offer more choice within our system
It is the case that some secondary schools send their pupils to another school to study a subject if they themselves do not have the teaching expertise or equipment or due to timetable constraints. We believe that this model can help to provide greater choice in the school system, by allowing schools within a certain area to each offer an 'expertise' in certain subjects.

To facilitate greater subject choice in the

education system, we would welcome the formalisation of school clusters, following the already established informal model. This would see secondary schools pull resourcing and teaching talent to offer a broader range of subject choice to local pupils. Where appropriate these should be able to be created across local authority boundaries, with no detriment to school funding.

A dedicated STEM teacher in every primary school
Under the SNP, Scottish performance in mathematics and science has seen significant falls in international comparisons. We also know that, despite best efforts, the uptake of STEM subjects continues to decline and there remains a persistent gender gap in female uptake. To improve both the performance of our pupils in and the uptake of STEM subjects, we need to get schoolchildren more enthusiastic about and confident in their abilities in STEM at an earlier age.

That is why we support every primary school (above a certain pupil threshold) having a dedicated STEM teacher in place. Where the minimum threshold is not met, we will ensure that a dedicated STEM teacher is shared between a cluster of schools. This will ensure that children are engaged in STEM subjects at an early point, increasing their chances of being likely to pick them and perform better in secondary school. As part of this approach, we would also set ambitious new targets for female STEM participation and performance, with this being a particular focus of the dedicated primary school teacher.

SQA accreditation for voluntary, part-time work and internships
Many senior school pupils undertake part-time work, internships in their holidays or volunteer. It takes real effort to maintain a job or significant

extra-curricular work while in full time schooling. While in some cases professional qualifications or volunteering awards are recognised by the SQA, in many cases they are not and there is no recognition for working or volunteering itself.

We believe that working or volunteering while at school, while not appropriate for or available to every pupil, is commendable and should be recognised. That is why we believe that the SQA should work with employers to give due credit in certifications for part-time work and volunteering. This accreditation should be flexible enough for the pupils themselves to request it from the SQA, providing they can provide proof of activity.

Delivering schools fit for our chilldren

Having a great learning environment is essential for delivering good education. Every child deserves to be taught in a local school building that is in good condition and suitable to serve as a place of learning.

However, 250 of Scottish schools are in 'Poor' or 'Bad' condition. It is not the case that these schools simply have minor issues. A school that is 'Poor' is defined by the Scottish Government as "Showing major problems and/or not operating optimally" and one that is 'Bad' "Does not support the delivery of services to children and communities". 60,836 Scottish schoolchildren attend schools assessed as being in 'Poor' condition and 1,050 pupils attend schools assessed as being in 'Bad' condition. Together they represent 1 in 11 of all Scottish schoolchildren.[9]

The same is true when measuring the suitability of a school building for being used as a place of teaching. 334 school buildings were deemed to be 'Poor' or 'Bad' in their suitability with 77,597 schoolchildren attending the former and 3,668 the latter.

In the past year, only 30 schools were rebuilt or refurbished, a significant decline in activity from previous years. At this rate it would take us more than 8 years to bring our entire school estate to a 'Satisfactory' condition and more than 11 years to make all buildings suitable to be used as schools. That is even with assuming no deterioration in schools that are currently considered 'Satisfactory' or 'Good', which will almost certainly not be the case, given that the number of schools in 'Good' condition is lower than it was last year.

Improving and maintaining our school estate is the responsibility of local authorities, with the Scottish Government delivering additional investment for specific priorities. From 2015/16 to 2020/21 the Scottish Government's capital budget has increased by 73 per cent to over £4.7 billion. Over the same period, the capital funding grant from the Scottish Government to councils was cut by 9 per cent.[10]

In 2018-19, total capital expenditure by councils was £2.977 billion, of which the Scottish Government grant covered £876.8 million, 29 per cent. £665 million of councils' capital expenditure was spent on education, down 26 per cent from the previous year. From the 2018-19 expenditure, £305.7 million was spent on primary, £266.8 million on secondary and £10.5 million on specialist schools.[11] For the same year, the Scottish Government's allocated £52.9 million for their own 'Scotland's Schools for the Future' programme.[12]

While the Scottish Government can invest in its own programmes of school investment, it is clear that an unfair financial settlement to councils is slowing investment in rebuilding and maintaining our schools.

Invest in our schools through fair funding to councils
We believe that our local services, including schools, should be funded fairly. It is unacceptable that the SNP Government has not passed on funding increases in their own budget to councils.

If the Scottish Government had applied the same increase in their own capital budget from 2015/16 to their capital grant to Scottish councils, then local authorities would have an additional £626 million to spend this year. If this translated to a similar percentage of the capital budget being spent on schools as we saw in 2018-19 (22 per cent), the latest available year for which we have data, then an additional £140 million would be spent on maintaining and rebuilding our local schools this year.

We see it as a failing that any pupil has to go to a school that is in a 'Poor' or 'Bad' condition or is unsuitable to be a place of education. We would make a commitment that no pupil will attend a school in 'Poor' or 'Bad' condition by the end of the next Parliament. By fairly funding our councils, we can ensure that our school estate gets the investment it needs, so that every child can be taught in a local school building that is in good condition and suitable to serve as a place of learning.

Facing hard truths to restore our world class reputation

The SNP have shied away from international scrutiny of their record on education. The reason for this is obvious, over their 13 years in government, our performance has declined or stagnated. Whereas Scottish education was previously believed to be among the best in the world, the data shows that our schooling has now just become average against our international competitors. In an increasingly globalised world, this disadvantages the next generation in competing for jobs and opportunities both at home and abroad. For this we do not blame teachers or the hard work of school pupils, we instead hold accountable the SNP Government and the difficult transition towards Curriculum for Excellence.

The internationally renowned OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)[13] provides a very stark picture of how Scottish education has declined under SNP and Labour governments. The survey has, since 2000, assessed the performance of children at age 15 in three skills, science, mathematics and reading.

Mathematics

Scotland's score in mathematics has declined in every single PISA survey since it was first measured in 2003. We have seen a fall from 524 in 2003, to 499 in 2009 and 489 in 2018, below the UK average of 502 and many European countries, such as Latvia, France and Slovenia.

Chart 5.1.1 Scotland's PISA mathematics scores, 2003-2018

The boxes represent confidence intervals where we can be 95% certain the 'true' value lies.

Scotland's performance in Maths in 2018 was similar to it's performance in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

Scotland's performance in Maths in 2018 was lower than its performance in 2003 and 2006

524   506   499   498   491   489
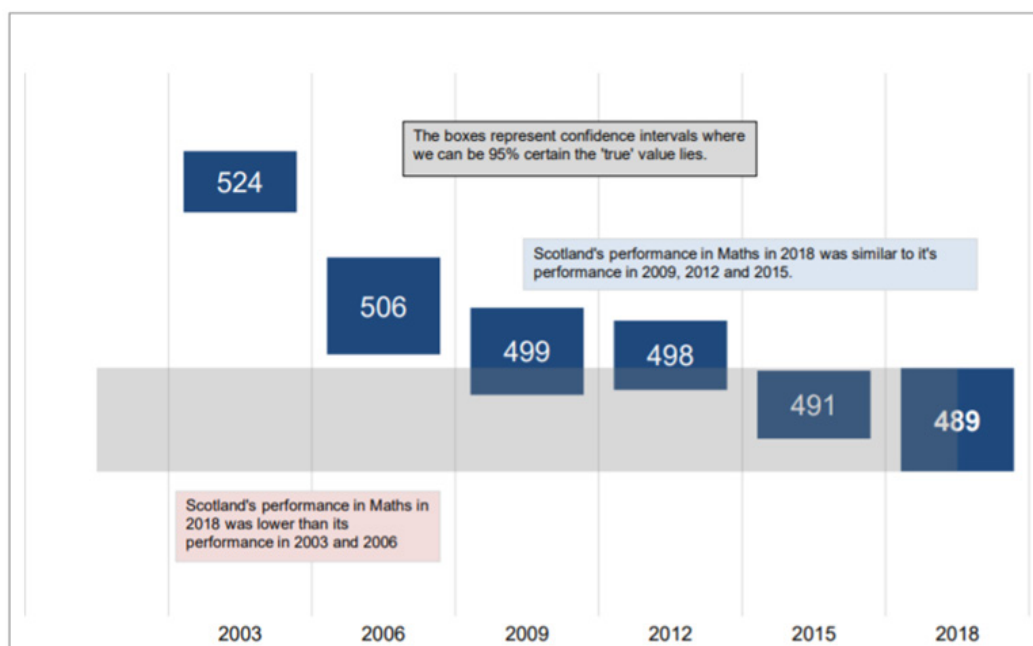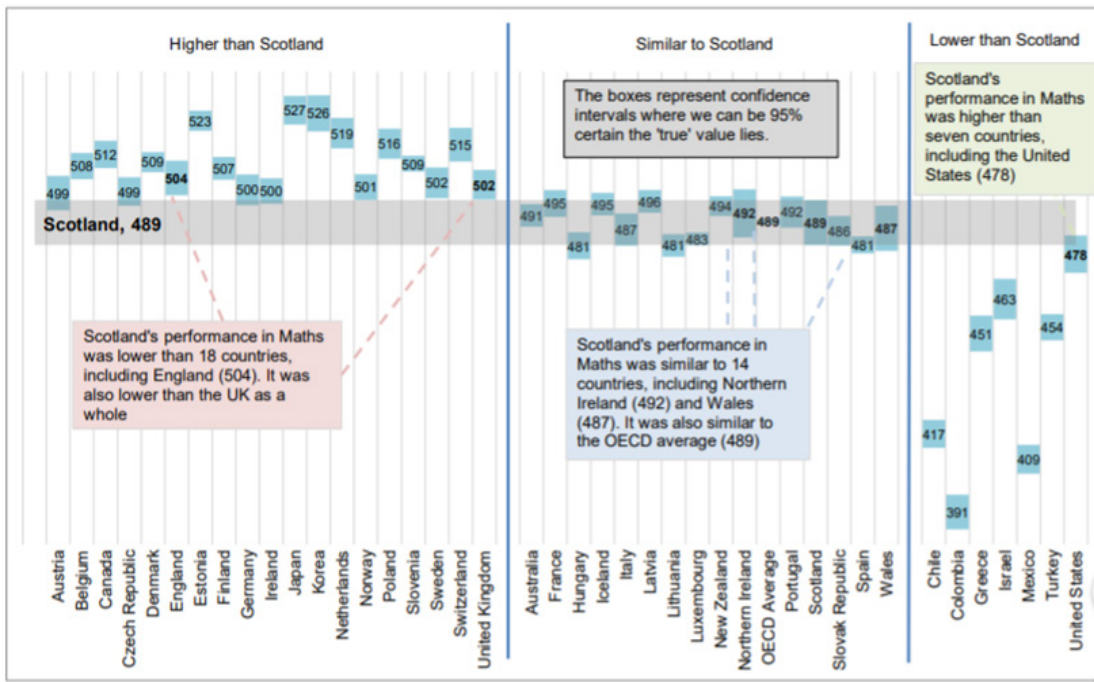
2003   2006   2009   2012   2015   2018

Chart 5.2.1 PISA mathematics scores of OECD countries (plus three other UK administrations), relative to Scotland, 2018

Higher than Scotland | **Similar to Scotland** | **Lower than Scotland**

The boxes represent confidence intervals where we can be 95% certain the 'true' value lies.

Scotland's performance in Maths was higher than seven countries, including the United States (478)

Scotland, 489

Scotland's performance in Maths was lower than 18 countries, including England (504). It was also lower than the UK as a whole

Scotland's performance in Maths was similar to 14 countries, including Northern Ireland (492) and Wales (487). It was also similar to the OECD average (489)

Reading

Scotland's reading performance sharply declined from 526 in 2000 to 499 in 2006 and then has largely stagnated to 504 in 2018. Scotland's 2018 performance matches the UK average but is behind Ireland, Finland and Estonia.

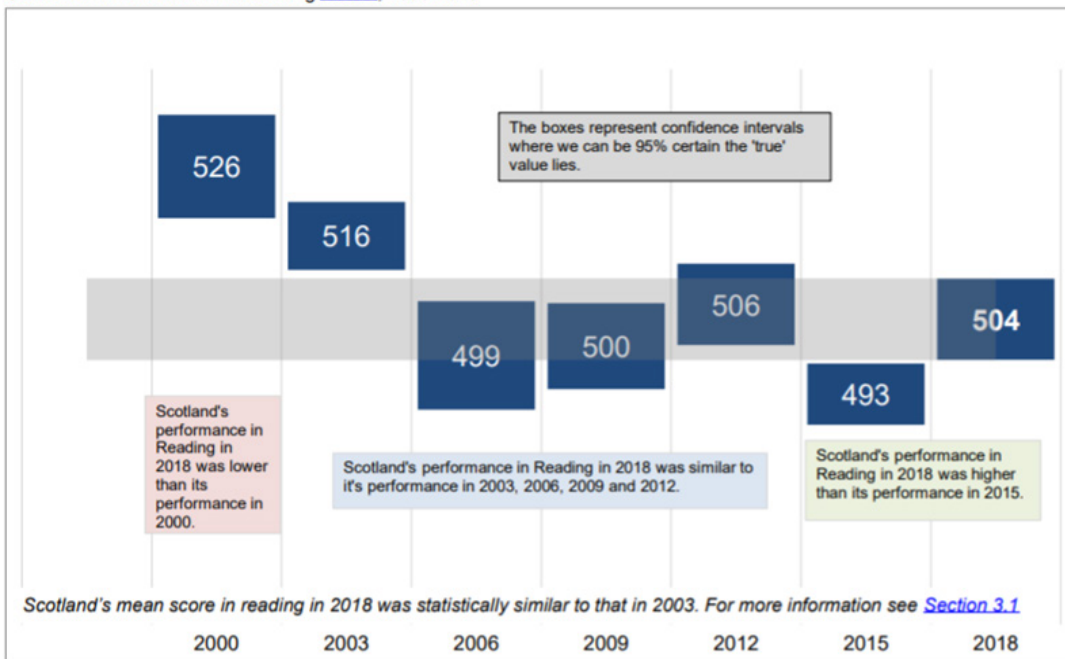Chart 4.1.1: Scotland's PISA reading scores, 2000-2018

The boxes represent confidence intervals where we can be 95% certain the 'true' value lies.

Scotland's performance in Reading in 2018 was lower than its performance in 2000.

Scotland's performance in Reading in 2018 was similar to it's performance in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012.

Scotland's performance in Reading in 2018 was higher than its performance in 2015.

Scotland's mean score in reading in 2018 was statistically similar to that in 2003. For more information see Section 3.1

2000 | 2003 | 2006 | 2009 | 2012 | 2015 | 2018

21

Chart 4.2.1 PISA reading scores of OECD countries (plus three other UK administrations), relative to Scotland, 2018
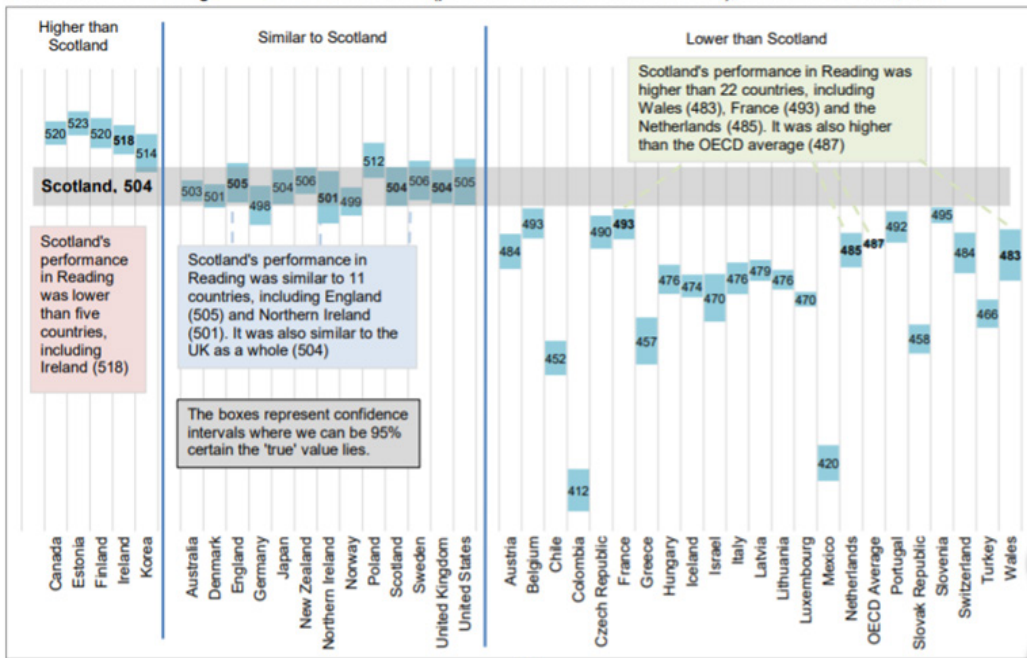
Science

Scotland's performance in science remained stable from 2006 to 2012 at 515 to 513 before sharply falling to 497 in 2012 and tumbling further to 490 in 2018. Scotland's performance in science is now well below the UK average of 505 and is worse than many European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Belgium.

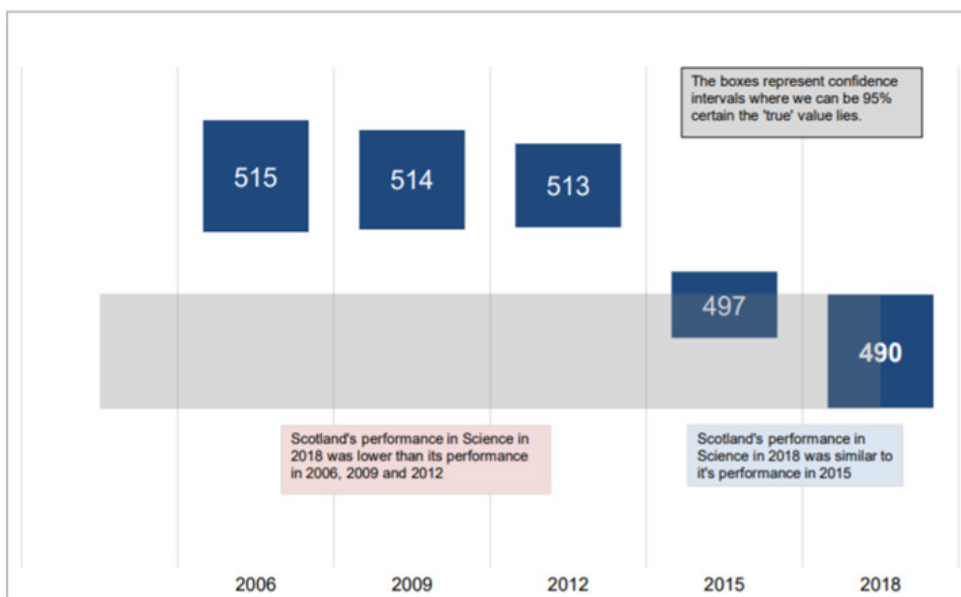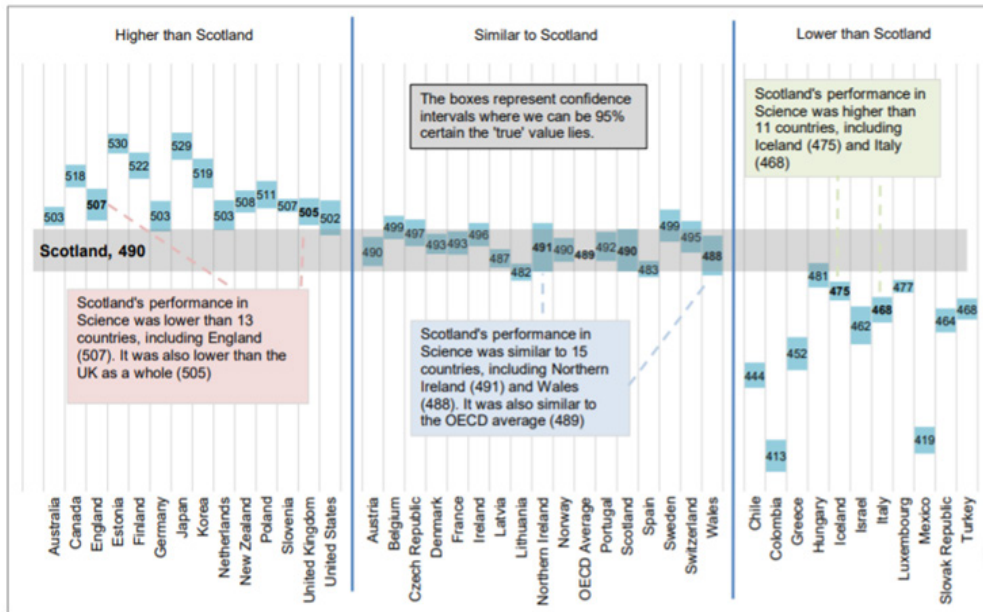Chart 6.1.1 Scotland's PISA science scores, 2006-2018

Chart 6.2.1 PISA science scores of OECD countries (plus three other UK administrations), relative to Scotland, 2018

This data shows the sharp decline in Scottish education standards against international competitors. In both mathematics and science we can see decline from the point at which Curriculum for Excellence was introduced.

However, PISA is now one of the few international surveys of comparison that the Scottish education system remains part of. In 2010, the SNP decided to withdraw Scottish schooling from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). We also know that they were considering removing us from PISA at the same time as well. Those decisions reduced the amount of international data that we have to assess the performance of Scottish education.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that more data, both as international comparisons and in the assessment of our national performance, is paramount to understanding how we improve Scottish education. We also have little faith in the SNP Government's track record of scrutinising itself. To deliver the data we need for better scrutiny and understanding of education performance we would:

Re-enter Scottish education into international comparisons.
Rebuilding our reputation for world class schooling must begin with a frank assessment of our current place in the world. We would reverse the SNP's decision to withdraw Scotland's schools from international studies and look at further opportunities for international comparison. We should also look to learn the lessons from the recent improvements in performance in other countries, especially from countries in Eastern Europe.

Establish an independent school and education inspector
Education Scotland has a role in both running and inspecting our school system and is answerable to the Scottish Government. In essence, the organisation both writes and marks its own homework. To ensure that school inspections and reviews of our education system are carried out on an independent basis, we would create a new inspectorate separate from Education Scotland that would report directly to the Scottish Parliament. This new body would also have a role in researching and publishing data on school standards and national assessments and on undertaking and commissioning reviews. We estimate this body would have a budget of a maximum of £15 million, some of which would come from the transfer of existing functions out of Education Scotland.

Publish the OECD report into the Curriculum for Excellence on time

In January 2020, the Scottish Parliament voted to extend an OECD review into the Broad General Education phase of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) to cover the entirety of the CfE. The OECD was originally due to report in February 2021 and we were extremely disappointed at the decision to delay the review's publication to June. We strongly believe that this is avoiding scrutiny ahead of the Scottish Parliament Election and would urge that this is reversed and that the review is published ahead of the election purdah.

We recognise that the last thing our teachers need right now is another costly and time-consuming reorganisation of the curriculum just when the approach set out in the CfE has become embedded. However, academics and professionals have stated that CfE is a flawed education reform that has led to declining standards across the board for Scottish education. We will consider the recommendations from the OECD carefully when they are published, to inform our approach towards CfE going forward.

Conclusion

This paper is intended to represent the start of our policy development on education. It is not an exhaustive list of the policies and approaches that will be contained in our manifesto for next year's Scottish Parliament Election.

However, we feel that it is important that we focus our national debate on our schools right now. Every single year, a new group of children enter our school system and another group of young adults leave. If that system does not give them the quality of learning they deserve, such as by sending them to a school building in 'Bad' condition or by constricting their subject options, then that will blight their experience of schooling. This is especially true for those pupils who need additional support at the right time. We only get one chance to give our children a good education and we fail them if we do not provide that.

The ideas that we have presented here are not novel, but they could be introduced by this SNP Government right now as a start to restoring our schools. Education is an area of policy that has been wholly the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament since 1999, there is no one to blame for declining standards in Scottish schooling at this time other than the SNP.

So we urge the SNP to put the old divisions aside and work with us to get on with the job of restoring our schools. Let us truly make education our "number one priority" for the next Parliament.

Endnotes

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