

Lack of certainty over school return 'completely unacceptable'

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23 Jul 2020



The refusal of the SNP government to give a guarantee that schools will reopen in full on August 11 has been criticised by the Scottish Conservatives.

Earlier today, education secretary John Swinney said infection rates were down, further progress had been made on coronavirus, and that children were largely unaffected by the disease.

But he still wants another week before formally giving the green light for a full return.

That means parents would have less than a fortnight to organise their own working and personal lives to accommodate the SNP decision.

Shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said it was time for Mr Swinney to show leadership on the issue and provide a "cast iron" guarantee for parents immediately.

He also questioned remarks by the education secretary suggesting some local authorities may revert to a blended learning plan, meaning some children could be in the classroom just once or twice a week.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said:

"It's completely unacceptable that, just a few weeks from the supposed reopening, parents still have no certainty over plans.

"Parents are furious and bewildered as to why pubs, restaurants and shops are all open, yet there's still no final decision on schools.

"John Swinney could easily have provided that much-needed certainty by taking a stand and making a decision on schools already.

"Instead he's keeping parents, pupils and teachers on tenterhooks by refusing to give the green light until July 30, leaving no time at all to deal with whatever decision is made.

"We also need a cast-iron guarantee from this SNP government that there will

be no postcode lottery when it comes to the re-opening of schools in Scotland. "It is beyond reprehension that children in one part of the country could miss out while others resume their school terms in full."

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23 Jul 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have demanded that the SNP government, today, formally commits to reopening schools full time next term.

The Scottish Government has stated that they will only make this decision on the 30th July – only 11 days in advance of the 11th August term start date.

This move has already been criticised by a member of the Scottish Government's own Education Recovery Group, Cllr Stephen McCabe who confirmed that 11 days was not enough time to prepare and that some councils were looking at returning with a part time, or blended, approach as a result.

This is already in direct contrast to the explicit commitment made by the SNP Deputy First Minister who promised parents that the re-opening of schools full time was the current plan that all councils were working to.

The Education Secretary, John Swinney, is due to give a statement to the Scottish Parliament on the reopening of schools today.

Jamie Greene, Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary has demanded that during the statement Mr Swinney formally commits to the return to full time education for all school children, so that schools, parents and children have time to prepare.

The call comes as the Scottish Conservatives also reveal almost 200 pages of correspondence to the First Minister and Education Secretary from parents outlining their anger and worry over the future of Scottish education.

The letters and emails spanning 187 pages, published as a Freedom of Information response, detail feedback from parents received by the SNP government between 8th – 17th June this year.

This is just before the SNP government announced their monumental u-turn to abandon blended learning.

Many parents wrote of the damage blended learning would do to their children's ongoing mental wellbeing and educational progress, while others wrote of the difficulties of getting back to work without children in full time education.

On blended learning, one parent wrote to the First Minister, "I believe these measures to be disproportionate and harmful."

And another said; "So what are we to do in August? How on earth are things going to work out. I do not expect schools to child mind my children but at the same time how can I work and rebuild my business and create employment for others and pay taxes if I cannot work full time? How is my child to cope mentally if [their] childhood is being robbed from [them]?"

While another parent wrote, "We are getting to a crisis point. It does not seem that children are being considered in this at all... Nothing about this approach is about the best interests of our children"

Jamie Greene, Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary said:

"The SNP's plans for schools have been in tatters for some weeks already.

"This SNP government must now finally listen to parents and commit today to reopen schools full time next term, as was promised.

"Schools and families need to know now if they are going back to school or not – the 30th July is simply too late and logistically impossible to deliver for many.

"This correspondence is just a snapshot of the deep worry and anger of parents over the future of Scottish education under the SNP government.

"Even supporters of the First Minister wrote in to complain about the government's failure to consider the best interests of children.

"The time for ambiguity and dither quite simply is over, Mr Swinney must now direct all of Scotland's councils to re-open schools full time on August 11th as he promised he would do.

"Anything less will be a betrayal of parents trust and one which will have a damning effect on education and our economy."

Sturgeon must condemn Salmond Russia

relationship

22 Jul 2020



Former Scottish Secretary David Mundell, Scottish Conservative MP for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale has condemned the former First Minister, Alex Salmond's continuing relationship with the Russian state as 'absolutely shameful.'

Speaking in the House of Commons this afternoon, Mr Mundell asked James Brokenshire MP, a Home Office Minister, "In the context of this report, does my right honourable friend agree with me that it is absolutely shameful that Alex Salmond, the former First Minister of Scotland remains in the pay of the Kremlin as an apparatchik for Russia Today and so few nationalists condemn him for it."

RT or Russia Today is a Russian state-controlled TV network on which Alex Salmond hosts his own talk show "The Alex Salmond Show".

The show is co-hosted and produced by fellow nationalist and former SNP MP Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh.

David Mundell MP said:

"It is now abundantly clear that the RT network, controlled by the Russian state, is used to disrupt and destabilise other countries.

"As the Intelligence and Security Committee Report shows, the Russian state is a serious threat to our security and democracy so is it astonishing that Alex Salmond is still taking money from them.

"In the context of this damning report, there can be no justification for a former First Minister and leader of the SNP, and advocate of independence, to be working for the Russian state.

"And what's just as concerning is the unwillingness of so many nationalists to call out this behaviour despite saying they have concerns about Russia.

"After the report was published we should have heard the First Minister speak out, so I now call on her and other leading nationalists to condemn Alex Salmond's ongoing relationship with the Russian state in the strongest possible terms."

Covid-19 complacency warning after 12 carers sent to same at-risk home

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22 Jul 2020



The SNP government has been warned not to take its foot off the gas on coronavirus – after it emerged a vulnerable family had been visited by 12 different carers within a week.

It was reported this morning that the at-risk couple in Glasgow had to sanitise their home after every visit, and were fearful of contracting Covid-19 because of the churn of different people coming into their home.

The Scottish Conservatives said, given the SNP's testing regime for carers was still well below-par, more had to be done to keep consistency with carers visiting vulnerable people.

Deputy leader Annie Wells also warned the SNP-run Glasgow City Council not to let standards slip just because the number of coronavirus cases were dropping.

And she added that if such a varying number of carers were being deployed in Glasgow, it could also be happening elsewhere in Scotland.

Speaking to the *Glasgow Evening Times* today, 76-year-old Jimmy Sweeney said: "Last week we had 12 carers come into the house, as opposed to the normal two or three. It is scary that we have 12 different people coming into the house when we are trying our best to stay safe at the moment."

Scottish Conservative deputy leader and Glasgow MSP Annie Wells said:

"It's obvious that sending such a high number of carers into the one house with vulnerable people is increasing the risk of spreading coronavirus.

"It's hard to see why so many different carers would be required for one household when they usually only have two or three.

"If this is happening in Glasgow the chances are it's occurring elsewhere in Scotland too.

"The SNP cannot afford to take its foot off the gas and get complacent just because the number of cases is on the decline.

"We know the testing regime for carers is still extremely poor, which makes sending multiple workers into the same at-risk home negligent and dangerous."

SNP should launch inquiry into Russia's indyref interference

21 Jul 2020



The SNP government should launch an inquiry to determine the extent of Russian interference in the independence referendum, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

A report published today exposed the activity of Vladimir Putin's regime in the 2014 vote, as well as other attempts to influence UK politics.

Shadow constitution secretary Murdo Fraser said such were the SNP's reported links with Russian organisations that a full inquiry was required.

After losing the referendum and being ousted as an MP, former First Minister Alex Salmond signed a deal with Russian state-run RT to host a chat show, which has run since 2017.

Senior SNP figures still make regular appearances on the show, which is produced by another former nationalist MP, Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh.

Scottish Conservative shadow constitution secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"This report suggests the SNP has questions to answer in relation to Russian interference.

"It has to explain what it knew about this issue and when.

"Given how Scotland and the independence referendum is at the centre of these allegations, it's essential the Scottish Government orders an inquiry on the matter.

"People will be very suspicious that the Yes campaign's most dominant figure ended up on the Russian payroll after losing the referendum.

"And over many years SNP figures have been more than happy to indulge questionable Russian media operations.

"It's clear much work is to be done by both the Scottish and UK governments to ensure future interference is stamped out."