

[Swinney misses golden opportunity to say how he will get CfE back on track](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Swinney misses golden opportunity to say how he will get CfE back on track

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John Swinney has “missed a golden opportunity” to say how he’d sort problems with teacher recruitment and the Curriculum for Excellence in a keynote speech, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Instead, the education secretary made a point of telling the audience at the Scottish Learning Festival: “I’ve not made any new policy announcements today, and I’m not going to.”

This is despite schools across Scotland being in the grip of a teacher recruitment crisis, with some even asking parents to help out.

And criticism is also mounting over the SNP’s Curriculum for Excellence, which experts have said lacks rigour and is in some areas “dumbing down” education.

In addition, after 10 years in charge of education, the SNP has failed to make any progress in closing the attainment gap between pupils from rich and poor backgrounds.

But rather than develop ideas to tackle these issues, Mr Swinney said today: “What I set out last year was the consistent direction of travel we are going to take for the whole of this parliamentary term with no deviation, with no diversion, with no distraction.”

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“This was the perfect opportunity for John Swinney to outline new ideas to get teacher recruitment and the Curriculum for Excellence back on track.

“Instead, he told the audience not only would there be no new policies in this speech, but not to expect any for the next few years either.

“He missed a golden opportunity.

“It’s been abundantly clear for some time that the Curriculum for Excellence is not delivering the high standards we need in terms of raising standards across the board and narrowing the attainment gap.

"Today provided a chance to address these concerns. Teachers and parents will be surprised to learn he didn't take it."