

Catching Up on Our Children's Education

Teachers have been off for over 267,000 days due to Covid since the return of school in September, meaning children have lost out on the equivalent of 1.5 million teaching hours in just this school year.

They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers.

Most children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities and had a devastating impact on mental health.

The pandemic has put a huge strain on children and young people's mental health. They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers. With 1 in 6 children now suffering from a mental health condition, providing catch-up funding is an important way to take this pressure off children.

There are also huge impacts for the economy – children could lose earnings of up to £46,000 each over their lifetimes.

Concerns over their children falling behind as a result of the pandemic is one of the top concerns of parents as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. The Conservatives have let down parents and children by failing to invest in catch-up classes to make up for lost learning throughout the pandemic.

Children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities.

This Government lost £16bn of taxpayers' money due to fraud and error in Covid loan schemes. Yet **they only committed £4.9 billion to our children's catch-up**. Not even one third of the £15 billion recommended by the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

Part of the reason we've seen the disadvantage gap grow during Covid is that many children from less-disadvantaged families are already getting extra tutoring or classes outside of school. As we recover from the pandemic, it is right that closing the disadvantage gap is a top priority for the Liberal Democrats.

In our new policy passed by members today, we are calling for:

- the Government to immediately commit the full £15 billion to catch-up

funding for children, in line with the recommendations from the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

- the Government to distribute £5 billion of this funding to Catch-Up Vouchers worth £200 a year for 3 years, given directly to parents for all 8.3 million children in state-funded schools.
- £400 a year of vouchers for disadvantaged children eligible for the Pupil Premium or those with special educational needs.
- £600 a year of vouchers for pupils with special educational needs who are also eligible for free school meals, and looked-after or previously looked-after children.

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This policy puts money directly into parents' and carers' hands to spend on whatever their children need most: tutoring in reading, writing or maths; music lessons; swimming classes or other physical education. And the 2 million most disadvantaged children would get double vouchers, so they can get the extra catch-up education they need.

For looked-after children, the vouchers would go to their foster parents or to the local authority, with a duty to spend them in the child's best interests. And those children would get triple vouchers, so they get the extra catch-up provision they need.

Our Catch-Up Vouchers could make an enormous difference to millions of children. We know it's vital to make sure all children get the catch-up support they need – **they deserve the best chance for a bright future.**

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Author:

[Action to Improve Air Quality](#)

Air pollution is to blame for nearly 40,000 deaths each year in the UK.

Everyone has the right to clean air, but it's a right many people in the UK are unable to realise. The Conservatives have repeatedly failed to take meaningful action to address this killer.

1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits.

Our national limits for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are set at **four times the level of the World Health Organisation guidelines.** 1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits. And the UK has broken air pollution limits for a decade, **costing the NHS billions to treat**

people affected.

We need to ensure that the right to clean air is one which people can realise.

That's why today Liberal Democrat members have passed a new policy calling for:

- The implementation or extension of **Clean Air Zones**, like that in my local authority of Bath, which was the first in the UK outside London.
- The introduction of legally binding **national limits for particulate matter and other pollutants** at or below current WHO guidelines.
- Funding to support buses, taxis and private hire vehicles to **switch to clean fuels**.
- Increased funding to local authorities to tackle air pollution.
- Empowering local authorities to:
 - Install more pollution sensors near major roads and at every urban school.
 - Publicise local air quality issues including publishing live pollution levels from their pollution sensors.

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Reducing air pollution is vital for the health of everyone in the UK, particularly children.

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Author:

[Political Reform to Tackle Sleaze](#)

This country is built on the simple mantra, that it doesn't matter how high and mighty you think you are, the rules are the rules. If you break the rules, you get punished. Yet **Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.**

Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

This Government showed its true colours back in Autumn 2021, with their decision to overturn Owen Paterson's 30-day suspension from the House of Commons. Then their lies were exposed with the revelations of parties in

Downing Street and the accusations that Number 10 officials and the Prime Minister have potentially breached lockdown rules.

Polling in December 2021 showed that just 5% of the public believe politicians work for the good of the country. **That is a tragedy for our democracy.**

The Government is accountable to the public, who have the right to a transparent Government that does not act above the law.

Previous Prime Ministers and previous Governments have all had their failings. However, **it has been a long time since we have seen, not just this stench of sleaze, but the absolute lack of resolve to do anything about it.**

Time and again, government ministers have refused to properly investigate allegations of sleaze, failed to declare relevant meetings and donations and tried to rig the system to cover their own backs.

Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.

This crisis has highlighted the imbalance of power between the executive and the legislature. This includes the Government's evasion of scrutiny during Parliamentary recess – only ministers can recall Parliament – and the Government's control of the Parliamentary timetable, thus limiting the issues which can be discussed by MPs.

The Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

In our new policy passed today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A public inquiry into the ongoing Conservative sleaze scandal, with the disclosure of relevant documents
- Codifying the Ministerial Code into legislation with governance independent of the Prime Minister
- Introducing a range of sanctions for those who break the Ministerial Code with an Independent Advisor for investigating breaches
- Giving MPs more control of the business in the House (e.g. recalling Parliament)

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We need an independent, statutory public inquiry, with the powers and resources to get to the bottom of this Conservative sleaze scandal – including the power to summon witnesses and require them to give evidence under oath.

We also need an independent investigation system – at present it's the equivalent of defendants in a court case also taking part in the jury. And we

must ensure those with a vested interest in tearing up Parliament's anti-sleaze rules don't have the power to do so.

Liberal Democrats are committed to creating an inclusive democracy, in which politicians from all parties can be trusted by the people they represent.

We will not stand by and allow this culture of sleaze to continue.

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Author:

[Meeting the challenge of the ecological emergency](#)

The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution. We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility

Conservative ministers claim to be close to the target of protecting 30% of the land and sea for nature, but are completely undermined by a lack of management measures and enforcement.

It's not acceptable. We can and must do better.

In new policy passed by our members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A plan for delivery of the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, with specific and costed policy measures.
- Substance to the Government's promise to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.
- Reforming the powers, purposes, funding and duties for AONBs and National Parks to restore nature.
- Ensuring that the environment is at the heart of all government policymaking.
- Greater powers for local authorities to help tackle the nature crisis.
- Reversing the cut in International Aid to support developing countries restore their ecosystems.

[Read the full motion](#)

The forthcoming UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) is a rare opportunity to

secure global commitments to addressing the ecological emergency. The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility abroad.

We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

Inadequate protection or investment in wildlife sites. **Debilitating funding cuts** to the statutory environmental agencies. Weak policies that fail to support a transition to a sustainable farming and fishing industry. **Undermining accountability** with their decision to restrict the independence of the new Office for Environmental Protection.

We must get our own house in order when it comes to the ecological crisis if we are going to be taken seriously on the world stage.

The world has failed to meet previous targets to halt the global decline in biodiversity. We cannot afford to fail again.

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Author:

[Expanding the Use of British Sign Language](#)

As a child I learned basic sign language.

My parents' had a friend whose mother had been deaf since birth and just loved looking after and playing with me.

Part of that was teaching me her language so we could chat about the TV we were watching, what I was doing at school or just whatever flitted through my happy little head.

It didn't seem like a big issue to me at the time. Natural in fact.

But over the years after Annie passed away I gradually forgot everything that she taught me so that when I met one of my heroes, Dame Evelyn Glennie I felt inept at relying on her to ensure we could communicate.

All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

It shouldn't be that way. Not for anyone.

British Deaf Association figures suggest that 151,000 people can currently use BSL in the UK including 87,000 hearing impaired users.

British Sign Language was recognised as a language in its own right by the UK Government in 2003.

Many parents may want or need their children to learn sign language, however they will need to pay for these lessons. Subsidised or free lessons are entirely at the discretion of local authorities.

As a party, we are deeply concerned that, despite deafness not being a learning disability, it can lead to underachievement of deaf children. All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

Better access and understanding of the language used by deaf children by both their teachers and their peers can only help to alleviate some of these problems. British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

The British education systems teach modern languages in the hope of fostering greater communication between peoples and bringing long-term economic benefits, British Sign Language lessons would fulfil both of these aims. Sign language is included on the education curriculum in Sweden, Norway and Finland who have seen no detrimental effects on children's education by adding more subjects.

School budgets are already creaking under the consistent underfunding and cuts from the Conservative Government.

In order for schools to be given the resources they need to teach British Sign Language, it must form part of the core curriculum for young people.

In our new policy passed today, the Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- The rapid introduction of GCSE equivalent qualifications in BSL in England.
- The Department for Education to commission a feasibility study into the introduction of BSL lessons in primary schools to embed the teaching of basic BSL from an early age, with expert findings to be offered to devolved education departments.

[Read the full motion](#)

This policy would sit alongside our other education policies to improve the

system for all, including for English, Maths and Science. We have also been in strong support of British Sign Language being given legal status as a way of raising awareness of deaf culture. Now that this idea is gaining traction politically across the spectrum, a GCSE and more accessible studies of the language should follow

Young children are able to learn languages at a faster rate due to rapid neural formation. If the aim is to get young children to fluency, then it is best to start at a young age.

Around 150,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language, these changes would give them a chance for a more integrated future with the children and adults around them.

As Liberal Democrats, we are committed to inclusivity. Not only will learning British Sign Language include those children who have hearing impairments, it will teach all children about the importance of this inclusivity.

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