

Layla Moran

Statement on Education to the House of Commons

Layla Moran, Lib-Dem Education Spokesperson in the House of Commons said this in response to the Queen's Speech in October 2019.

I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Yes, as a maths teacher, I have been rather frustrated by the headlines coming out of this Government, such as “£14 billion over three years,” when we will not get back to former levels until 2020. In fact, the money that schools are seeing right now is not enough. This year’s OECD teaching and learning international survey shows that the top thing that schools spend money on is more teachers, and then we heard that there would be a welcome rise in the amount of money available to first-year teachers, but that needs to come out of school budgets, as and when they are increased. The state gives with one hand, but it takes with the other.

Importantly, where the state has taken, it has taken from the most vulnerable and poorest areas. According to the National Education Union, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Leaders, 90% of secondary schools in the highest free school meals band will still face a funding shortfall in 2020-21, and funding cuts were above average in seven of the 10 poorest local authorities in England. Schools need the money now, not later. As a result of not providing that money, the Government are failing our children.

Teaching assistants are being sacked, with 50% of schools either considering it or already having done so in the past three years. Cash-strapped councils are struggling to support children with the most complex needs. Education, health and care plans increased by 16% between 2017 to 2018, yet schools need to make up the first £6,000 and so are penalised for doing the right thing. More than 200 schools in England have cut short the school week or are actively consulting on it, including schools in my area. We want and deserve world-class schools, but this Government will not be able to deliver them. They have not done that so far, and even with more money, where are the ideas to do it?

This is not just about funding. In fact, we are above average on the OECD funding table, so why are other countries leaping ahead? This Government are ideologically driven to deliver an education system that may have worked 50 years ago, but it is not based on the evidence of what works now. It is about high-stakes testing with little care for actual learning. We know about the narrowing of the curriculum, and we know that high-stakes tests cause anxiety for our children. In fact, I was written to in May by Aoife, who was in year 6 at the time, and she told me that her school prepares her for SATs with

“huge numbers of SATs practices that I have to do, sometimes up to two a day... since Christmas! I feel as though we often spend more time on practices than we do on actual lessons... Please can you do something in government to try and make the focus more on the teachers and less on us, so that we do not have to do so many practices and can do some fun learning.”

I could not agree more with Aoife. In fact, looking across the world at high-performing systems, that is exactly what they do.

The Liberal Democrats demand better. We would let our teachers get on with their jobs, rather than make them have to penny-pinch to buy the basics. We would invest in the most disadvantaged children and give councils the first £6,000 of any EHCP,

so that school are not penalised for taking the children that they want. We would spend £1 billion to save our colleges. By the way, “Love Our Colleges” badges are in all the Whips Offices, and I hope that everyone will wear them today, because colleges have been the Cinderella service of our education system. We would extend the pupil premium to age 19, because deprivation does not stop at 16. We would scrap SATs and replace Ofsted with an even more rigorous system that puts at its heart what the data is showing drives real attainment and wellbeing. We need a bolder agenda for education—not just paltry funding pledges, but real reform of the whole system, led by evidence, that will make the most of every child in our country.