

# Scottish party manifesto analysis: Education (Primary and Secondary)

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## SNP

### Key policies:

- Introduce Bright Start Breakfast clubs across all primary and special schools
- Expand free school meals and wipe out school meal debt with the School Meal Debt Fund
- Introduce Welcome to School Bags for all Primary 1 pupils
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms

### Summary and analysis:

The SNP's commitments on primary and secondary education focus on maintaining high staffing levels, expanding support, and modernising how schools operate. The manifesto highlights Scotland's position as having the lowest pupil-teacher ratio in the UK and pledges to at least maintain this, alongside ensuring the country continues to have the most teachers per head of population. It introduces new universal entitlements such as a "welcome to school" bag for every child and commits to expanding Additional Support Needs provision, reflecting a focus on inclusion and early support. The SNP also proposes a national expansion of childcare from nine months to the end of primary school, which reshapes the interface between early years and primary education. In terms of school environment and behaviour, the manifesto includes a classroom phone ban across primary and secondary schools and continued investment in school buildings. While it emphasises devolving more power to headteachers, raising standards, inclusive education and supporting students with additional support needs, the manifesto provides less detail on how schools will be supported to manage these expanded responsibilities within existing resource pressures.

## Scottish Labour

### Key policies:

- 2,000 education recovery teachers, 1,500 more classroom assistants.
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms.
- Free breakfast clubs in all primary schools.
- Two weeks of funded holiday clubs during the summer.

## Summary and analysis

Labour set out an education agenda centred on closing the attainment gap, raising core standards, and supporting those who may have fallen behind. Their commitments to expand specialist teachers, improve classroom support, and strengthen early intervention require significant workforce growth, yet the manifesto does not fully specify how recruitment pipelines, training capacity, or retention strategies would be scaled. There is some specificity in the implementation of an education recovery programme, with up to 2,000 specialist reading and numeracy teachers for these students who have fallen behind, but there are no details on costs or geographic spread. Labour's focus on improving attainment and improving education quality depends on close alignment between education, social care, and community services, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these cross-sector governance arrangements would be reformed.

Their emphasis on curriculum stability and improved assessment sits alongside ambitions for broader wellbeing and inclusion, yet the manifesto does not address how competing demands on teacher workload would be managed. Labour's proposals also imply increased local authority responsibility (e.g. Family Network Coordinators, skills and careers advice services, industry work placements for secondary school pupils) but the manifesto does not outline how councils, many facing financial constraints, would be resourced to deliver expanded provision.

## Reform UK (Scotland)

### Key policies:

- “Reboot” Curriculum for Excellence
- Abolish Education Scotland
- Increase head-teacher autonomy over budgets and staffing
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms
- Secondary schools can apply for '[Jordanhill self-governance model](#)'
- Shift focus from university to vocational pathways, apprenticeships, and trades
- Create a Scottish Skills Strategy across ten “clusters of excellence,” including financial services, advanced manufacturing, energy, food and drink, tourism, creative industries, life sciences, agriculture, fisheries, and marine.

### Summary and analysis:

Reform's education agenda prioritises discipline, traditional academic standards, and structural rollback of existing national frameworks. Their proposals to “reboot” the Curriculum for Excellence, expand exclusion powers, and abolish Education Scotland assume that system performance can be improved through central structural changes, yet the manifesto does not address how transitional disruption, regulatory gaps, or curriculum continuity would be managed. Their emphasis on rigorous examinations and standardised testing requires robust assessment infrastructure and teacher capacity, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these would be strengthened in a system already facing workload and staffing pressures.

Reform's focus on school autonomy, including wider access to the Jordanhill style governance model, raises questions about equity, oversight, and the risk of increased variation between schools and local authorities. Their approach places less emphasis on inclusion and ASN provision, despite rising demand and significant pressures on specialist services. As a result, while Reform articulate clear priorities around discipline and academic rigour, the governance, workforce, and equity implications of their model remain insufficiently developed.

## Scottish Conservatives

Key policies:

- 1,000 additional classroom assistants
- Scrap Curriculum for Excellence, introduce Curriculum for Aspiration
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms
- Teacher recruitment and retainment: national workforce plan for teachers, sabbaticals for career development, pay teachers for extracurricular activities
- Abolish Education Scotland

### Summary and analysis

The Scottish Conservatives set out a primary and secondary education agenda focused on strengthening academic standards, increasing school level autonomy, and tightening expectations around behaviour and assessment. Their proposals to restore greater "rigour" through more testing and regular check ins sit alongside an emphasis on discipline and clearer lines of responsibility for school leadership. While this signals a shift toward more structured monitoring of progress, the manifesto gives limited detail on how schools with existing staffing pressures or variable local authority capacity would be supported to deliver these changes.

There is a specific commitment to Additional Support Needs, with a pledge to recruit 1,000 additional classroom assistants and to undertake a national review of mainstreaming for pupils with ASN. These measures indicate an intention to strengthen in school support, though the manifesto does not set out how recruitment challenges or training needs would be addressed.

Alongside these proposals, the Conservatives advocate expanding school choice and replacing the Curriculum for Excellence with a new Curriculum for Aspiration. This represents a significant curriculum shift, but the manifesto provides limited information on how such a transition would be managed or how consistency would be maintained across schools. Overall, the agenda combines a focus on standards and structure with changes to curriculum and learner pathways, though the practical implications for capacity, implementation, and system coherence are not fully developed.

## Scottish Liberal Democrats

Key policies:

- Inflation proof Pupil Equity Funding
- 2,000 more pupil support assistants

- Increase specialist support such as speech and language therapists
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms
- Provide teachers with stable contracts

#### Summary and analysis:

Scottish Liberal Democrat policy on primary and secondary education is built around strengthening in class support, improving behaviour and attendance, and restoring stability to the teaching workforce. The manifesto places significant responsibility on schools to deliver more personalised support through additional pupil support assistants, specialist staff and a renewed focus on early intervention, yet these expectations rely on local authorities having the capacity to recruit, train and retain staff at scale. Their commitment to play based learning in the early years, smartphone free schools and expanded extracurricular provision signals a preventative approach to wellbeing and attainment, but the operational detail on how schools will balance these new duties alongside existing pressures is limited.

Workforce reform, such as ending short term contracts, expanding specialist training, and improving recruitment for hard to fill posts, aim to stabilise the profession, though the manifesto does not fully outline how these changes will be funded or sequenced within wider budget constraints. The party also proposes new national strategies, enhanced data systems and strengthened rights for pupils with additional support needs, but the governance arrangements required to coordinate these reforms across councils, Education Scotland and teacher education providers are only partially developed. Overall, the agenda sets a clear direction focused on support, stability and early intervention, but the delivery architecture needed to embed these changes across Scotland's diverse school system is less fully articulated.

## Scottish Greens

#### Key policies:

- Recruitment more teachers and support staff
- Reduce class sizes
- Expand free-school meals and mental-health support
- Ban mobile phones in classrooms

#### Summary and analysis

The Scottish Greens set out an education agenda centred on equity, inclusion, and structural reform, but the manifesto does not fully explain how these ambitions would be delivered within a system already under significant workforce and resource pressure. Their commitments to reduce class sizes, expand ASN provision, and strengthen pupil wellbeing require substantial teacher recruitment, specialist staffing, and local authority capacity, yet the manifesto provides limited detail on how these would be scaled in the context of national shortages. The Greens' emphasis on curriculum reform, participatory governance, and rights-based approaches assumes strong alignment between national agencies, local authorities, and schools, but the

manifesto does not specify how governance structures would be adapted to support this.

Their preventative framing, linking education to poverty reduction, mental health, and community wellbeing, depends on effective cross sector coordination, yet the mechanisms for aligning education with social care, youth services, and public health remain underdeveloped. As a result, while the Greens articulate a coherent equity driven vision, the workforce, governance, and cross system integration required to deliver it remain insufficiently detailed.

*This manifesto analysis was published by the UofG Centre for Public Policy on 19 May 2026.  
For more information, contact [public-policy@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:public-policy@glasgow.ac.uk).*

*The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401*