



A high quality education system is the cornerstone of a progressive society and plays a vital role in preparing children and young people for the future. Years of flawed management by successive Sinn Féin Ministers has resulted in a fragmented and disjointed education system which fails too many of our young people. While a minority leave school with better qualifications than counterparts elsewhere on these islands, many leave school illiterate and lacking numeracy skills.

An investment in educating children is an investment in our economy and in our ability to compete globally. Equipping our pupils with cutting edge skills will create a sustainable, vibrant economy able to generate modern jobs in the future. Put simply, it means young people can enjoy prosperity and employment throughout their lives.

Curriculum & qualifications

A key aspect of any vibrant and successful education system is a modern curriculum. The SDLP will introduce a comprehensive review of primary and post-primary curricula to ensure that what is being taught in our classrooms is relevant to modern life. This review will include input from education professionals and those from the world of work.

In addition, we will reinstate the requirement to study a modern language to at least GCSE.

Coding and computer skills will be provided through the new Digital Technology and Coding Academy.

The SDLP will ensure young people continue to study numeracy and mathematics until they are aged 18, within or in addition to the current qualifications regime. The SDLP will lead a wider review of all current school-based qualifications and curriculum to ensure that students are being given the best education possible.

Numeracy & Literacy

We are duty-bound to invest in better literacy and numeracy outcomes for the many young people who leave schools with huge skills gaps in these areas. The SDLP will make sure that an updated literacy and numeracy strategy is published, aimed at tackling the root causes of educational underachievement which lie in social deprivation.

We will ensure that the future strategy works at family, community and school levels. Involving teachers, parents, siblings, wider family and volunteers is a key way to improve standards in these areas.

From STEM to STEAM: (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics).

To succeed in this, we need to move from a focus purely on STEM subjects to a wider focus on STEAM subjects. That means a recognition and understanding that Arts subjects provide many vital skills for children and young people.

As well as ensuring that STEM subjects are on the curriculum from primary school, the SDLP will ensure that arts subjects play a vital role in curriculum design and that STEAM subjects run through all parts of our education system. We will also ensure more productive links between schools, further education, higher education and the business world.

Youth Council

The decision to scrap the Youth Council was wrong and against the best interests of young people in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP will undertake a significant overhaul of the Youth Sector funding mechanisms to ensure they are correctly funded to complete the important work that they do on a regular basis.

Supporting teachers and discipline in schools

Teachers are at the heart of a good education. It is vitally important that we support and invest in our teachers.

If we are to introduce a new curriculum to better prepare students for the world of work, then teachers must be empowered to deliver it. To do this we need to foster relationships between teachers and business leaders within the community in order to create dynamic relationships that can provide future leaders. We must re-evaluate and reaffirm the 'Every School is a Good School' policy consideration on supporting professional development within the teaching profession.

Put simply, we will support teachers in the classroom, ensuring that their training needs are met. We will reform school disciplinary procedures to empower teachers to spend more of their time teaching.

Cross Party Commission on academic selection

Since the abolition of the 11 plus in 2008 children are now forced to sit up to five exams instead of the previous two. The SDLP does not support academic selection at 11 but the current situation cannot be allowed to continue. We will invite all parties to join in a commission to explore options for future transfer, to report within one year.



Early Years

The SDLP believes that the first years of a child's life are where the foundations are laid and lifelong paths are established. These formative years go on to have multiple impacts on health, educational achievements and opportunities and it is vital that every child has the highest level of support.

The SDLP will introduce an Early Years Bill for Northern Ireland that would provide a clear legislative framework for the co-ordination, funding, development and delivery of early years education, care and support services by public bodies in conjunction with community and voluntary sector.