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Expert to help maths teachers find winning formula

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Jo Boaler from Stanford University in the US will give speeches aimed at inspiring Scottish teachers to change their methods

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Education chiefs are to fly a maths expert across the Atlantic in an effort to address declining levels of numeracy among Scottish schoolchildren.

Jo Boaler, professor of mathematics education at Stanford University, is due to arrive this month and will give speeches aimed at inspiring maths teachers to change their methods.

Dr Boaler, who has built an international reputation, rejects the notion that some people have a “maths brain” and are good with numbers while others are not. She has also called traditional ways of teaching maths outdated and believes in presenting mathematical problems visually.

Her methods have been widely adopted in American education and are credited with achieving radical improvements in test results. She was recently named one of eight people “changing the face of education” by the BBC.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has raised concerns about basic errors being made by maths candidates in national exams. Scotland has fallen in the international education rankings for subjects including maths.

A Scottish government report recently found that many people were happy to describe themselves as “no good with numbers”, with deep-rooted anti-maths attitudes holding Scotland back educationally and economically.

Iain Gray, Labour’s education spokesman, said: “Given the fall in numeracy and maths standards under the SNP, we should certainly listen to the experts. But all the experts in the world can’t make up for the SNP’s utter failure to support our teachers and schools.

“John Swinney must get the basics right first — starting by paying teachers a decent salary and getting enough of them into our schools with the support staff and resources they need.”

Dr Boaler’s visit, which will include speeches at a maths teachers’ conference in Edinburgh and the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow, has been endorsed by Education Scotland and the Winning Scotland Foundation.

Morag Arnot, executive director of Winning Scotland Foundation, said: “Jo Boaler’s revolutionary way of teaching mathematics could have a huge impact on the way we teach maths in Scotland. We have already seen its impact in pockets across the country where teachers have been adopting her ideas.

“For too long children have been unfairly labelled as either ‘good at maths’ or ‘not good at maths’. We want teachers, parents and pupils to know that with a growth mindset and an open approach to maths, we can improve attainment levels in Scotland.”

Alan Armstrong, strategic director at Education Scotland, said: “We are very much looking forward to welcoming Dr Boaler to the Scottish Learning Festival, the largest professional learning event in Scotland.

“Dr Boaler is world renowned in the field of mathematics and we’re delighted to work with the Winning Scotland Foundation to give Scottish educators the opportunity to hear and learn from Jo’s expertise and thinking.”

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