

MSP faces ridicule by rivals for education comment

Herald, The (Scotland)

Friday May 27, 2016 12:00 AM

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AN SNP MSP who sends her children to private school has been accused of hypocrisy after using her maiden speech at Holyrood to proclaim that "education is not a commodity to be bought or sold".

Ashten Regan-Denham , who was elected to represent Edinburgh Eastern, came under scrutiny during the campaign for sending her twins to a fee-paying institution despite presenting herself as a staunch left-winger.

After claiming tuition fees represented "the creeping commoditisation of everything" and attacking the approach in England , Ms Regan-Denham said: "I subscribe to the idea education is not a commodity to be brought or sold like a tin of beans or a loaf of bread, but rather an expression of society's belief in learning for its own sake, a wider benefit to all of society."

She made her first contribution in the Scottish Parliament chamber the day before a Sutton Trust report was published showing Scottish young people from the fifth most advantaged areas are four times more likely to go to university than those born into the poorest 20 per cent of areas. The equivalent figure in England is 2.4 times.

At a hustings event ahead of the election in which she defeated Labour leader Kezia Dugdale to take her constituency, Ms Regan-Denham was forced to defend her decision to choose private education after an SNP voter was critical of the move.

She said her twins went to a state school for six years before her family decided on a fee-paying option due to a lack of "wrap-around care" in the sector that about 95 per cent of the country's school children rely on.

Average independent day school fees in Scotland are just under Pounds 11,000 per year.

The Scottish Conservatives' Liz Smith , said: "If anything, this SNP MSP should tell the Holyrood chamber about the virtues of independent schools, seeing as she clearly values them so much."

Neil Findlay , the Labour backbencher, said: "This is a remarkable statement from Ms Denham said with no hint of irony."

An SNP spokesman said her family's education was a private matter reflecting family circumstances.

Credit: Daniel Sanderson

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