

Education, Children and Young People Committee

12th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 4 May 2022

Public Petitions

Introduction

1. Petitions are a way for people or organisations to ask the Parliament to do something.
2. A petition must be asking something that is within the powers of the Scottish Parliament. It must be relevant to the whole country rather than a local or individual matter.
3. Every petition is considered by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (CPPPC), which then determines which action to take on each petition. One of the actions that the CPPPC can take is to refer a petition to another Committee.
4. In its [legacy report](#), the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee highlighted four petitions that had been referred to it, which remained open at the end of the Scottish Parliament session—
 - **PE1548**: National Guidance on Seclusion and Restraint in Schools;
 - **PE1668**: Improving literacy standards in schools through research-informed reading instruction;
 - **PE1692**: Inquiry into the human rights impact of GIRFEC policy and data processing; and
 - **PE1747**: Adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools.
5. This paper sets out the background of each petition and the last action taken by the Session 5 Committee. It also invites members to agree what future action to take on each petition (Annexe D sets out the standard options available on each petition).

PE1548: National Guidance on Seclusion and Restraint in Schools

6. Petition [PE1548](#) is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce National Guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in all schools; this guidance should support the principles of:
 - Last resort - where it is deemed necessary, restraint should be the minimum required to deal with the agreed risk, for the minimum amount of time
 - Appropriate supervision of the child at all times, including during “time out” or seclusion.
 - Reducing the use of solitary exclusion and limiting the time it is used for (e.g. maximum time limits)
 - No use of restraints that are cruel, humiliating, painful and unnecessary or not in line with trained techniques.
 - Accountability of teaching and support staff for their actions; this should include recording every incident leading to the use of seclusion or restraint and monitoring of this by the local authority.
 - Regular training for staff in how to avoid the use of restraint.
 - Where restraint is unavoidable training in appropriate restraint techniques by British Institute of Learning Disability accredited providers and no use of restraint by untrained staff.
7. It is also calling on the Scottish Government to appoint a specific agency (either Education Scotland or possibly the Care Inspectorate) to monitor the support and care given in non-educational areas including the evaluation of the use of restraint and seclusion of children with special needs in local authority, voluntary sector or private special schools.
8. The 2015 [SPICe briefing](#) for the petition sets out the background:

“The petition is not about specific incidents but rather asks for national guidance...the petitioners also ask for the use of restraint and seclusion to be monitored. Currently, the use of restraint in residential care is monitored by individual establishments and an annual return made to the Care Inspectorate (S4W09371). There is no similar national monitoring for non-residential schools.

Schools are inspected by Education Scotland. Only where a school provides residential accommodation will it also be inspected by the Care Inspectorate.”
9. The Session 4 Public Petitions Committee first considered this petition at its meeting on 17 March 2015, when it took evidence from the petitioner, Beth Morrison, Ian Hood, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland and Kate Sanger, the Challenging Behaviour Foundation. The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government, the Care Inspectorate, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, ENABLE Scotland, the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition, the Educational Institute for Scotland, COSLA, Children 1st

and the Ministerial Working Group on Child Protection and Disability. The Session 4 Public Petitions Committee continued to correspond with the Scottish Government before [agreeing](#) to include the petition in its legacy paper for consideration by the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee.

10. The Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) continued to consider this petition, and at its meeting on [19 January 2017](#) it agreed to seek an update from the Scottish Government on publication and use of the ‘communication passport’ and the ‘toolkit’ for practitioners, and to invite the Deputy First Minister to provide oral evidence at a future meeting.
11. The Scottish Government published its refreshed national guidance, [Included Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions](#) on 19 June 2017. This refreshed guidance includes information and advice for Education Authorities on De-escalation and Physical Intervention. Although the petitioner [welcomed](#) the guidance, she felt “there is more to do to ensure the protection of Scotland’s most vulnerable children”.
12. The PPC continued to liaise with the petitioner and the Scottish Government on the refreshed national guidance throughout 2017 and 2018. In September 2018, a joint report called *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* was launched by Children in Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism, which touched on issues raised within the petition. Similarly, in December 2018, the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland laid in Parliament a [report](#) titled *No Safe Place: Restraint and Seclusion in Scotland’s Schools*, which concluded that “professionals responsible for children do not have consistent, unambiguous guidance or feedback mechanisms to ensure they are equipped to appropriately support vulnerable children at moments of crisis.”
13. On [7 November 2019](#), the PPC heard evidence from—
 - the petitioner Beth Morrison,
 - Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, and
 - Nick Hobbs, office of the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland.
14. This evidence followed the publication of the aforementioned reports, as well as a [submission](#) from the petitioner in August 2019 which called for a statutory “robust legal framework” to be in place rather than just the guidance.
15. At its meeting on [19 December 2019](#), the PPC heard evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that “the Scottish Government will produce new national guidance that will provide a clear human rights-based policy on physical intervention and seclusion in Scottish Schools”.

16. After taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary, the PPC agreed to refer the petition to the Education and Skills Committee on the basis that the petition could be taken into account in ongoing and upcoming work. It also agreed to highlight that “if the guidance as it develops is not effective, the Government has made a commitment to look at what may be done to ensure that there is a means by which the guidance can be put on a statutory basis”.
17. At its meeting on 22 January 2020, the Session 5 Committee agreed to write to the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask for an update on the new guidance. That letter can be read [here](#).
18. The Cabinet Secretary [responded](#) on 19 February, providing the Committee with a copy of the [terms of reference](#) for a working group being established to develop and agree new guidance. It was anticipated that this new guidance would be developed and agreed by October 2020 after which a 12-week consultation process would commence.
19. In a submission provided for the [11 November 2020 meeting](#), the petitioner confirmed that, at that time, she was part of the working group which was still working on a draft of the guidance. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Deputy First Minister and, then, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, to seek an update. In his response of [16 February 2021](#), the Deputy First Minister explained that progress had been delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic and indicated that guidance would be finalised later in 2021.
20. As yet, this guidance has not been published.
- 21. The Committee is invited to write to the Cabinet Secretary to ask for an update on anticipated timescales for the guidance being developed by the working group and to agree any other actions in relation to this petition.**

PE1668: Improving literacy standards in schools through research-informed reading instruction

22. Petition [PE1668](#) is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:
 - 1) Provide national guidance, support, and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.
 - 2) To ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.
23. The Session 5 Education and Skills Committee considered [PE1668](#) at its meeting on 30 October 2019. The *Official Report* of that discussion is

available [here](#). The paper from the Clerk which informed the Committee's discussion is [here](#) (paper 1). The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the petition including taking evidence from the petitioner.

24. The Committee then agreed, at a later meeting, to timetable the petition in advance of the formal evidence sessions to its *Inquiry into Initial Teacher Education and the Early Phase of Teaching*. This was intended to allow the broader issues raised by the petition to be explored with the petitioner, and also for the session to include a focus on any issues that could inform the inquiry. However, the session, scheduled for 18 March 2020, was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee subsequently paused its inquiry into ITE, to examine issues related to the response to the pandemic.
25. For the meeting on 18 March 2020, the petitioner provided a submission in support of her petition. This submission is included in the [11 November 2020 meeting papers](#). This submission has been included in the Annexe B of this paper.
26. The petitioner recently provided a submission highlighting the publication of [Ontario Human Rights Commission \(OHRC\)'s Right to Read Inquiry Report](#). This is provided at Annexe C of this paper.
27. **The Committee is invited to agree what action to take in regard to this petition.**

PE1692: Inquiry into the human rights impact of GIRFEC policy and data processing

28. Petition [PE1692](#) is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to initiate an independent public inquiry into the impact on human rights of its routine gathering and sharing of citizens' personal information on which its Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) policy relies.
29. The petition was lodged on 13 June 2018 and considered by the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) in June and November 2018. The Session 5 Education and Skills Committee gave its initial consideration to this petition on 29 May 2019 and then followed this up on 27 November 2019.
30. The petitioners [appeared before the Public Petitions Committee](#) and made two supplementary written submissions to that Committee (see [submission 1](#) and [submission 2](#)). This, in addition to the [background summary](#) on the intention of the petition and a [SPICe paper](#) provides context for this Committee's consideration.
31. The PPC also wrote to the Scottish Government and the Information Commissioner (ICO) on issues raised by the petitioner. Having considered the responses from the [Scottish Government](#) and the [ICO](#), the Committee agreed

to refer the petition to the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee for further consideration.

32. The central issues raised by the petitioners relate to current policy and practice under GIRFEC. During the consideration of the Children and Young People (Information Sharing) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 in 2017 the petitioners sought a view from the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee on the need for a public inquiry and the Committee responded stating that current information sharing practice had not been the prime focus of the Committee's scrutiny, it had been more focused on the proposed legislative provisions in the Bill.
33. The Bill was withdrawn by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 19 September 2019. His [statement](#) to Parliament explained the basis for the Scottish Government's decision to withdraw the Bill, including advice from the GIRFEC Practice Development Panel, and the next steps in relation to information sharing practices.
34. After its meeting on 27 November 2019, the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee agreed that the Convener should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills for an update as to when the suite of products referred to in a previous letter in respect of guidance and products to support information sharing practice will be available. The Committee also agreed to write to all local authorities to ascertain that they were using the revised guidance from the Information Commissioners office.
35. The Cabinet Secretary [responded](#) on 29 January 2020, confirming that the suite of products referred to in his September 2019 letter were still in the early stages of development but that the Scottish Government "expect[ed] to publish these materials by the end of 2020 and the additional guidance will be subject to a consultation process".
36. In January 2020, the clerks received responses from 28 of the 32 councils to confirm that they are not using the 2013 guidance (Dundee City Council, East Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council and Moray Council not did respond).
37. The petitioners provided a submission in relation to their petition in advance of the 11 November 2020 meeting. This was included at Annexe A of the [papers](#) prepared for that meeting.
38. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Deputy First Minister and, then, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, to seek an update. In his response of [16 February 2021](#), the Deputy First Minister explained that progress had been delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic and indicated that guidance would be finalised later in 2021.
39. As yet, this guidance has not been published.

40. The Committee is invited to write to the Cabinet Secretary to ask for an update on the timescales and to agree any other actions in relation to this petition.

PE1747: Adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools

41. Petition [PE1747](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools (Primary, Secondary and Special).

42. The 2019 [SPICe briefing](#) for the petition sets out the background:

“The policy around local authorities meeting children’s Additional Support Needs (“ASN”) is complex and has been subject to longstanding debate. The main legislation setting out local authority duties and parents’ rights in this area is the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. In addition, s.15 of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000 introduced a legal presumption in favour of children being educated in mainstream schools.”

43. The Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) first considered this petition on [10 October 2019](#), and agreed to write to the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, COSLA and Enable Scotland.

44. The PPC next considered this petition on [26 August 2020](#), by which point it had received responses from the [Scottish Government](#), [Education Scotland](#) and [COSLA](#) as well as a submission from [Royal Blind](#). The PPC agreed at that meeting to refer the petition to the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee as it was “the best place for continued serious consideration given its upcoming work on additional support needs”.

45. At its meeting on 11 November 2020, the Session 5 Committee agreed to keep the petition open given upcoming work on additional support needs and pending a future work programme discussion.

46. In its legacy report, the Session 5 Committee explained that it did undertake work on the Additional Support for Learning following the referral of petition PE1747, including taking evidence from Angela Morgan on her Additional Support for Learning review report at its [18 November 2020 meeting](#) and looking at additional support needs as part of its pre-budget scrutiny. However, the Committee stated that, given time constraints, it was unable to fully consider the petition.

47. The Committee is invited to agree to consider this petition as part of a future work programme discussion and to agree any other actions it wishes to take in relation to this petition.

Agenda item 1

ECYP/S6/22/12/3

Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks

29 April 2022

Annexe A

Annex A: PE1548 National Guidance on the use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools – submission from Beth Morrison

With reference to the above petition, now overseen by the Education & Skills committee, I can confirm that I have joined the Scottish Government SLWG to inform the writing of the new Guidance.

I asked for the membership of the group to increase to include certain organisations which I felt needed to be represented in order to provide much needed expertise in areas complimentary to that of the other members. I am happy to report that this was done, and we had a couple of meetings in person pre-COVID-19 and have had a few telephone meetings since then.

We are still working on a draft of the guidance, and so far, this is going as I had expected and there has been much written around the rights of children and young people.

Several significant concerns remain. The first being that the contribution of union representatives focuses *entirely* on the rights of staff, often without any relevant experience of children with ASN and how those children use behaviour as communication. As someone who has a large number of teachers and former teachers in my extended family I recognise and respect the need to consider staff rights, but I find myself constantly requiring to remind too many on the group that the key focus of the SLWG is around the wellbeing of vulnerable children and that this must remain at the heart of everything we do. The reason I wanted to expand the membership of the group was to make sure this doesn't happen, and I worry that their voices are being lost whilst the focus remains on "staff safety" rather than children's wellbeing.

I also continue to have serious concerns that the output of the SLWG will only be "guidance" and will not be statutory. To be frank, if the output is not statutory, the content will have little effect, especially in the many parts of the country where the current non-statutory guidance is routinely ignored. We must make sure that children's rights are protected in law. I know that the UNCRC is going to be incorporated into domestic law, but we need to make sure that going forward, this piece of guidance is not just another set of words on paper that will not be heeded by education staff, though the main cause of non-compliance in my experience lies in education leadership and teacher representation rather than at the grass roots level itself. Teachers have been, and continue to be, let down by those who are supposed to look after their interests and wellbeing by their failure to grasp the benefits that robust guidance could bring to them.

The fact that those leading and representing teachers seem unwilling to hear or believe that there are benefits that accrue to teachers from statutory guidance, or

indeed to even engage in discussions about how adherence to guidance might help them, is a major source of concern. They simply make assumptions that any such output is designed to penalise staff, which it is not. Any training for good practice and adherence to the guidance could be funded by diverting monies from restraint training which councils currently pay for and which is much more expensive than preventive training, thereby producing budget savings rather than increased costs. It should also increase staff retention and reduce absenteeism.

I continue to be optimistic that the new guidance (once finished) will be more robust than what we had within IEI2. However, without the guidance being statutory, my fear is that nothing will actually change the experience of the children.

Annexe B

Annex B: Submission from Anne Glennie in support of PE1668

Over five years ago, I wrote to my MSP Alasdair Allan and the GTCS to express my concern about teachers' knowledge of beginning reading instruction. Three years ago, I started a petition urging the Scottish Government to i) provide national guidance, support, and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics; ii) ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.

The petition has considerable international support from experts, researchers, and academics working specifically in the field of reading instruction.

Examples are included at the end of this document.

A successful literacy strategy should take place within a '*rich literacy environment*' and include all 'Five Pillars of Literacy': **phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension** – as well as reading for pleasure. While '*phonics is only one part of learning to read*' – the problem we currently have in Scotland is that teachers are not equipped with the required knowledge to deliver all five elements effectively. Crucially, the one that is lacking is phonics – hence the focus on this aspect. We know from our own surveys (*Review of the Scottish Government Literacy Hub Approach*¹, 2014 and *Gathering views on probationer teachers' readiness to teach*², 2017) and indeed from the Education and Skills Committee's own work, that there are serious gaps in teachers' literacy knowledge and specifically beginning reading instruction. In some universities, this is actively withheld, with outdated, ineffective methodologies still being promoted.

A child learns to read once in their life – ***we now have robust evidence through scientific enquiry that means we know exactly what to do to ensure that we get this right for every child. All children, including those with reading difficulties and dyslexia, should be taught using the most up-to-date scientifically proven methodologies – failure to do so amounts to professional negligence.***

This issue affects everyone involved with Scottish education. Given the wide-ranging impact, the committee may wish to look to other English-speaking countries to see how they have addressed these issues, such as full-scale reviews, task forces, legislation, and incorporation into teaching standards. Here are some suggested, initial (and in no way exhaustive) courses of action:

- ITE institutions include research-informed approaches to reading as part of literacy education, specifically on systematic synthetic phonics teaching, its key features, and what leading edge practice looks like in the classroom. Students should be equipped with enough knowledge to enable them to teach a phonics lesson and to evaluate any literacy/phonics programme, reading

resource, or intervention to determine if they meet the criteria for systematic synthetic phonics

- A short, downloadable document could be disseminated by Education Scotland to all schools and teachers. This would provide clear guidance on systematic synthetic phonics instruction, outlining key features of best practice, and signposting to current research, phonic programmes, interventions, resources, and sources of training that align with the evidence base.
- New, specific Experiences and Outcomes and/or Benchmarks could be issued to provide much needed clarity around the key principles of systematic synthetic phonics that focus on students explicitly learning the key principles underpinning SSP e.g. knowledge of the alphabetic code (sounds and letters), blending for reading (decoding), segmenting for spelling (encoding) and writing.
- The Scottish government could introduce **a simple, optional, free, light-touch phonic check** (including word and nonword reading) at the end of Primary One (or midway through Primary Two.) **The main purpose of this check would be to act as a screener to identify children with dyslexia/literacy difficulties at the earliest opportunity** and to provide intervention where appropriate. (Additionally, the check could provide robust, trackable data for schools – and would indicate the effectiveness of their chosen reading/phonics/literacy programme.)
- Any organisation that advises schools, teachers, and parents on literacy matters, difficulties and/or dyslexia, such as Dyslexia Scotland, **should ensure that all advice and resources are evidence-based and research-informed.** All school inspectors should be aware of the evidence base for systematic synthetic phonics and what best practice looks like in the classroom.
- **Regardless of where they live or the school they go to, any child being diagnosed with dyslexia or dyslexic type difficulties should have immediate and urgent evidence-based intervention in the form of high quality systematic synthetic phonics.**

Our teachers, and our children, are being left behind. This is a matter of national (and international) concern. Although there are hundreds of studies supporting the place of phonics in reading instruction, ironically, the very first piece of longitudinal research to confirm that synthetic phonics was the most effective when teaching reading and spelling, came from Clackmannanshire³ in 2005. This internationally renowned study was a catalyst for other countries to investigate their own reading practices. Following the Rose Review⁴ (***Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, 2006***), and given the weight and clarity of evidence, **systematic synthetic phonics was mandated in 2014 as the sole method for beginning reading instruction in England;** it is also mentioned in their teacher standards (equivalent to our GTCS standards), therefore ITE universities are required to teach it. Clear guidance is given to schools through Ofsted's new Education Inspection

Framework⁵ (EIF) introduced in 2019, and every inspection now includes a mandatory 'deep dive' analysis of the school's approach to early reading, with every inspector being trained on the evidence and hallmarks of effective practice. Indeed, there are **many schools in England who have already shown that they can close the poverty gap and the gender gap through research-informed reading instruction – even when the majority of their intake is disadvantaged, and/or where their children have English as a second language.**

Last year, the Australian Government announced that they are setting up a task force to '**provide expert advice on incorporating phonics into the national accreditation standards for initial teacher education**' along with the introduction of a 'free, voluntary phonics health check for Year 1 (Primary 2) students so parents and teachers can better understand a child's reading level and what support they may need'⁶. They also plan to '**increase the time allocated to literacy in ITE courses**' and make '**the teaching of phonics and reading instruction mandatory for initial teacher education (ITE) courses.**⁷

We have no comparable official national guidance or practice to support schools or teachers in Scotland. Even in Clackmannanshire, schools are now following out of date whole-language practices for reading. In addition, despite repeated requests, ITE institutions have failed to engage or respond to questions from the Petitions Committee regarding this matter.

Most literacy programmes (particularly council in-house authored programmes) and interventions being used with dyslexic or struggling readers in Scotland today, do not meet their key criteria of systematic synthetic phonics. Scottish teachers' knowledge is so weak in this area, they are unable to evaluate the content or suitability of programmes or interventions, much less provide appropriate, timely and tailored teaching and support.

I am now aware of a Scottish case where a parent is taking their local authority to a tribunal, claiming they have broken the Equality Act 2010, by failing to teach their dyslexic son how to read as their literacy instruction and interventions did not include systematic synthetic phonics, the only suitable teaching method for a child with dyslexia. Three international experts, two dyslexia experts and a literacy expert, support this claim. All three experts agreed that the child required systematic synthetic phonics when starting his education, but he did not receive it. The authority was using a well-known literacy programme from another authority, widely used across Scotland. The literacy expert has provided evidence that their literacy programme is based on an old discredited model for teaching literacy and does not contain systematic synthetic phonics.

While this case relates to one family's experience, should the parent win this case, the ramifications and repercussions for other dyslexic children, struggling readers, schools, teachers, and authorities will be enormous.

Scottish education has **systemic deficiencies** in how children are taught to read; solutions must be system-wide – not merely an optional extra for individual schools. By providing teachers with access to the research and scientifically proven methods for teaching reading, there is the potential to close gaps, teach dyslexic children to

read and spell, improve our literacy rates and outcomes, and increase access to the curriculum for all. **Choosing instructional approaches that are evidence-based and effective is the single greatest thing that can be done for all children in Scotland and their education.**

I implore the committee to seek out and listen to leading experts and reading researchers, such as Dr Sarah McGeown, Professor Kathy Rastle, and those listed below, and take urgent action on this long overdue matter.

cc public domain

Examples of key supporters (not exhaustive):

Dr Steven Dykstra (USA)

Dr Kerry Hempenstall, Senior Industry Fellow, School of Education, RMIT University (Australia)

Debbie Hepplewhite, MBE, FRSA (UK)

Dr Sarah McGeown, Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University (UK)

Professor Kathy Rastle (UK)

Sir Jim Rose, CBE, FRSA - Doctor of Laws - Formerly Her Majesty's Inspector and Director of Inspection for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (England)

Dr Linda Siegel (Canada)

Professor Pamela Snow, PhD, FSPA, MAPS (Australia)

Distinguished Professor Emeritus William E. Tunmer, PhD, Massey University (New Zealand)

Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall AM (Australia)

References:

1. Review of the Scottish Government Literacy Hub Approach (Christie, Robertson & Stodter, 2014)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/0044/00449063.pdf>
2. Gathering views on probationer teachers' readiness to teach (Scottish Government, 2017) <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/12/2065/8>
3. THE EFFECTS OF SYNTHETIC PHONICS TEACHING ON READING AND SPELLING ATTAINMENT A SEVEN YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY (Johnston and Watson, 2005) <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14793/1/0023582.pdf>
4. School Inspection Handbook, Early Reading, paragraph 298 (Ofsted, 2019) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>
5. Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Final Report, Rose, 2006) <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf>
6. <https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/bringing-phonics-australian-schools> (Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, October 2019)
7. <https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/getting-results-australian-students> (Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, December 2019)

Annexe C

Dear Members of the Committee,

We would like to thank you for considering this petition, which was lodged almost five years ago.

Petition summary: Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to i) provide national guidance, support, and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics; ii) ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.

This petition has the potential to achieve two key priorities of the National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan (2019) namely:

- **Improvement in attainment**, particularly in **literacy** and numeracy
- **Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.**

Last week the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released their Right to Read Inquiry Report which calls for changes to Ontario's approach to early reading, including training current and future teachers in evidence-based approaches to reading. The inquiry and its findings are directly relevant to Scotland where initial teacher education in Scotland does not sufficiently prepare student teachers to teach children to read.

Ontario now joins a growing list of states in America and Australia where they are adopting approaches that will make it mandatory for schools and ITE programmes to have a research-informed reading curriculum and provide appropriate CPD for all teachers.

Ironically, Scotland is notably absent from these fresh commitments to the science of reading. The 2005 Clackmannanshire study by Johnston and Watson is internationally renowned and was the first to confirm the superiority of synthetic phonics over analytic phonics for teaching children to read and spell. Following the Clackmannanshire research, England conducted their own inquiry: *The Rose Review* in 2006, subsequently introducing a phonics screening check in 2012, with phonics being mandated as *the sole method of reading instruction* in 2014.

While it is true that most schools in Scotland use some form of phonics, the vast majority also use sight words (memorisation of whole words) and multi-cueing strategies, where children are taught to look at the pictures, read on or back, to guess what particular words might be. Most schools still use older style banded or levelled reading books, as opposed to decodable readers, which children can read independently using their current phonic knowledge. This means that the most common type of reading instruction seen in Scotland is not aligned with the scientific evidence.

It is essential that teachers are trained in the science of reading and this petition focuses on an essential element of this - systematic synthetic phonics. There is considerable research evidence that children taught by systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) make both short- and long-term gains in reading, spelling and reading comprehension. **Furthermore, SSP is particularly beneficial for children who start school with weak vocabulary skills, which are often those children from disadvantaged backgrounds.** Developing word reading skills efficiently and effectively ensures children become confident and successful readers early on, which is critical to develop their language skills and a love of reading.

This petition does not seek to introduce a prescriptive approach to the teaching of reading across Scotland; it aims to ensure teachers are empowered with the most recent research to optimally teach children the most important skill they will learn in school: how to read. Training teachers in research-informed reading instruction will not remove professional independence—it will ensure teachers are confident in their research knowledge to be able to adapt initial reading instruction to support all children in their class, and identify early on, those children in need of additional support.

We urge the committee to consider this petition again soon. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further and share the research to support it. This petition has the potential to have a genuinely positive impact on the literacy skills and life of all children and young people living in Scotland. We cannot continue to ignore the research on this matter any longer.

Anne Glennie (Petitioner)

Dr Sarah McGeown, Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, University of Edinburgh

Annexe D

Options available to Committees considering petitions

Once a petition has been referred to a subject Committee it is for the Committee to decide how, or if, it wishes to take the petition forward. Among options open to the Committee are to:

- Keep the petition open and write to the Scottish Government or other stakeholders seeking their views on what the petition is calling for, or views on further information to have emerged over the course of considering the petition;
- Keep the petition open and take oral evidence from the petitioner, from relevant stakeholders or from the Scottish Government;
- Keep the petition open and await the outcome of a specific piece of work, such as a consultation or piece of legislation before deciding what to do next;
- Close the petition on the grounds that the Scottish Government has made its position clear, or that the Scottish Government has made some or all of the changes requested by the petition, or that the Committee, after due consideration, has decided it does not support the petition;
- Close the petition on the grounds that a current consultation, call for evidence or inquiry gives the petitioner the opportunity to contribute to the policy process.

When closing a petition, the Committee should write to the petitioner notifying the decision and setting out its grounds for closure. Closing a petition does not preclude the Committee taking forward matters relevant or partly relevant to the petition in another way.