

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 11 December 2024
19th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE2051: Improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents

Introduction

Petitioner Dianne Youngson

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- establish a consistent and transparent reporting mechanism for incidents affecting the health of pupils in schools;
- review and improve upon the existing guidelines for schools in dealing with at-risk pupils;
- place in law monitoring of reporting mechanisms with ultimate responsibility being placed with Scottish Ministers and local authorities; and
- reform the exclusions procedure to include consideration of whether exclusions may cause further harm.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2051>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 21 February 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. In August, the Scottish Government published the [Relationships and behaviour in schools: national action plan 2024 to 2027](#).
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 23 January 2024.](#)

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8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 177 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee
December 2024**

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2051: Improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents

Petitioner

Dianne Youngson

Date Lodged

3 October 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- establish a consistent and transparent reporting mechanism for incidents affecting the health of pupils in schools;
- review and improve upon the existing guidelines for schools in dealing with at-risk pupils;
- place in law monitoring of reporting mechanisms with ultimate responsibility being placed with Scottish Ministers and local authorities; and
- reform the exclusions procedure to include consideration of whether exclusions may cause further harm.

Previous action

Now living in North East Scotland, I contacted my constituency MSP Alexander Burnett to discuss issues around school bullying and violence against children and young people. Mr Burnett and his office have been supporting me in gathering information about under-reporting, based on incidents reported through casework.

Background information

I was 14 years old when I attempted to take my own life on school grounds. Despite the teachers becoming aware no medical help was sought and no support was given to me by the school. I was left sitting in a classroom cupboard for the day.

After being discharged from hospital I was told that I was 'unofficially excluded' for a few days to 'get myself together'. The school chose to conceal the incident and asked me not to speak about it.

I have spent 20 years trying to come to terms with the incident and have experienced distressing mental repercussions as a result

More recently, I read an article about other unreported incidents at my former school and concluded that it was time to campaign to bring change and create a safe environment for our children and future generations.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2051 on 21 February 2024

The Convener: PE2051, on improving the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents, was lodged by Dianne Youngson. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish a consistent and transparent reporting mechanism for incidents that affect the health of pupils in schools; to review and improve the existing guidelines for schools in dealing with at-risk pupils; to place in law the monitoring of reporting mechanisms, with ultimate responsibility being placed with the Scottish ministers and local authorities; and to reform the exclusions procedure to include consideration of whether exclusions may cause further harm.

On reporting and monitoring, the SPICe briefing notes that all schools and local authorities are expected to use the bullying and equalities module in the SEEMiS information system to record and monitor bullying incidents. However, Education Scotland's review found that the module is challenging to use and that national guidance is not being fully implemented, which leads to inconsistencies.

The submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills highlights the getting it right for every child approach and, in particular, the role of a child's named person. She has also highlighted the counselling services that are in place throughout secondary schools, which are available for children who are 10 years old and over

On exclusions, the 2017 national guidance is noted. That guidance states that exclusion should be used as a last resort and should be a proportionate response where there is no appropriate alternative, with the wellbeing of the individual being a key consideration.

Last year, the Scottish Government held a series of summits on relationships and behaviour in schools. The cabinet secretary provided an update on that work to Parliament in November and announced that a joint action plan will be developed to address the issues that had been raised. In that statement, the cabinet secretary also encouraged more accurate recording of all incidents of inappropriate, abusive or violent behaviour in schools.

In view of the information that is before us, do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: Could the committee write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to request a timeline for the development and publication of the joint action plan on relationships and behaviour in schools, and information about how the Scottish Government expects its call for accurate recording of incidents in schools to be achieved?

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The Convener: Do colleagues agree to that approach?

Members indicated agreement

The Convener: We will therefore keep the petition open and seek the information as set out by Mr Torrance.

Annexe C: Written submission

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 25 March 2024

PE2051/B: Improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents

Thank you for your letter of 23 February 2023 and the opportunity to provide further information in relation to Petition PE2051 to improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents.

The Committee is seeking information on the timeline for the development and publication of the joint action plan on relationships and behaviour in schools. The action plan is a joint plan with COSLA and is being developed in collaboration with the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS). Following my announcement of the intention to develop this plan on 29 November 2023, SAGRABIS met on 12 December 2023, 31 January and 20 March to discuss this. The joint nature of this plan means it requires to be agreed both by SAGRABIS and by COSLA. Subject to this agreement, we expect that the plan will be published in the Spring.

The Committee also sought further information on how I expect my call for accurate recording of incidents in schools during the statement in November to be achieved. The Committee will be interested to know that we are currently reviewing the national anti-bullying guidance '[Respect for All](#)', supported by a working group of key stakeholders. A subgroup has recently been established to identify and consider changes required to the [supplementary guidance on recording and monitoring](#).

This will be informed by the [thematic inspection](#) undertaken by HMIE looking at approaches to recording and monitoring bullying incidents in schools.

The report published in February 2023 highlighted challenges, including difficulties in navigating the SEEMiS system, the length of time required to complete the recording and updating of incidents, the potential for duplication, a lack of flexibility to detail incidents and actions taken to support those involved, and the ability to monitor specific issues, trends and other patterns, restricting proactive responses. Education Scotland will imminently be publishing a toolkit of good practice on recording and responding to bullying incidents, and we would expect this to inform the development of our guidance and also local practice.

Finally, you may also be aware of the significant action I have been taking over recent months in response to concerns about relationships and behaviour in schools. This includes holding three summits on different aspects of relationships and behaviour. The first summit discussed [recording and monitoring incidents in schools](#); the findings of which will inform the guidance update, as well as whether any additional actions on recording and monitoring incidents are required within the action plan.

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I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful, and the Committee is reassured that relationships and behaviour in schools is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government.

JENNY GILRUTH MSP