

P-06-1494 Welsh Government to protect funding in education from WG and Local Authority cuts - Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee, 13 January 2025

My response to the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education in relation to my petition P-06-1494.

I don't feel that the issues have been completely understood. While we are aware of the investments made into education by WG the petition was to request consideration of WG ring-fencing funds to be protected for education within LA budgets. Last year's multiple LAs made massive cuts to their education budgets and the general feeling was that this was an easy cut to be made. It wasn't only parents that were concerned. Headteachers from many different areas within different LAs were sending out letters warning parents of the impacts of the cuts on their children which included staff redundancies, loss of 1:1 staff and cuts to ALN services within schools. This should never be the case.

Parents continue to contact us on a daily basis asking for support with their children not having their needs met at school. The frequency of pleas for help is only increasing particularly in the last 6 months. Whether this is as a result of the budget cuts or the funding going to the wrong places is unclear.

Today we heard that the Children's Committee was told the number of children waiting for an autism or ADHD assessment in Wales could nearly triple to 61,000 over the next two years. We know there is a link between the number of recorded ALN children decreasing and an increase families trying to get a diagnosis. Families of children with ALN in Wales are feeling unsupported by schools and local authorities. Parents are desperately trying to get a diagnosis simply to get their child's needs recognised. It all comes back to the fact that the professionals who are now meant to recognise the needs are teachers. They are not mini educational psychologists. A lot of professionals are unaware of masking/fawning or can't recognise them. Professionals are not aware of different presentations like female presentations which are often different to the text books. Academic children who are achieving acceptable grades are overlooked while they struggle with social/emotional or sensory needs. These in between children are surviving and not thriving and some of them will end up in burnout or with emotionally based school non attendance and some will even have school related trauma. The Cabinet Secretary for Education talked about absenteeism in schools in her letter. As she has raised it I would like to ask her why no-one is looking at the true causes for this. Why is there an assumption that it's the parents fault and that fines will fix it? Forcing children to attend a place where their needs are not being met and they don't feel safe every day is not going to solve anything. While schools and LAs continue to deny children's additional learning needs there will continue to be high levels of non attendance. It's an impossible situation for parents and a desperate

place for many children. At the bottom I have added a link to an article written from a research paper on school distress. A very insightful read.

We urge the Welsh Government to take immediate and decisive action to address these issues. Ring-fencing funds for education within local authority budgets (for ALN in particular) is a necessary first step to ensure that every child has access to the support they need to thrive in school. Education is the foundation of our children's future, and it must be protected from the pressures of budget cuts.

We ask that you prioritize the voices of families, educators, and professionals in these discussions and work collaboratively to create a system that meets the needs of all learners. Without swift intervention, we fear that the challenges faced by children with ALN will only continue to grow, with long-lasting consequences for their well-being and education.

Yours sincerely,

Cath Drews

<https://researchfeatures.com/children-frontline-neurodivergence-school-distress/>