P-06-1559 Uphold ALN Children's Right to Needs-Based Support and Full-Time Education in Wales - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 11 February 2026

Thank you for continuing to consider the concerns raised in this petition. I feel it is important to clearly set out the lived reality behind the policy language and assurances provided.

Invisible Disabilities and Unequal Treatment

There is a growing perception among families that if a child has a visible physical disability, support is more readily acknowledged. However, children with invisible disabilities — including neurodivergent conditions — are too often overlooked, minimised, or treated as behavioural issues rather than recognised as children with additional needs.

Many children cannot access community activities, clubs, or informal social spaces because environments are not accepting or inclusive of neurodivergent children who do not "fit in." Families report exclusion, judgement, or being asked to leave. Inclusion exists in principle, but not consistently in practice.

There are extremely limited genuinely inclusive spaces. There are few breaks for families. Siblings receive little recognition or respite, despite being significantly affected by the pressures within the household.

Denial of Specialist Children's Services – With and Without Diagnosis

The Cabinet Secretary's letter reiterates that support should be needs-led and not dependent on diagnosis. However, this is not what families are experiencing.

My own son was refused support from Specialist Children's Services on the basis that he did not have a formal diagnosis, despite clear and documented needs.

At the same time, within the parent group I run, I know families whose children have formal diagnoses and have still been denied appropriate support from Specialist Children's Services.

This reveals two serious and contradictory failures:

Children without diagnoses are refused support because they lack a label.

Children with diagnoses are refused support despite having one.

In both situations, children's needs remain unmet. Diagnosis is being used inconsistently as a gatekeeping mechanism, contrary to the needs-led framework set out in law.

Placement Decisions and Inconsistent Criteria

My son was assessed by Educational Psychologists, who advised that a split placement would benefit him. Despite this professional recommendation, the local authority denied this on the basis that he is "social."

Many children who are social attend specialist settings successfully. Sociability does not negate additional learning needs, nor does it remove the requirement for an appropriate placement. To refuse provision on that basis raises serious questions about how professional advice is weighted in decision-making processes.

When educational psychology recommendations can be disregarded for subjective reasoning, families are left with little confidence that decisions are being made purely on assessed need.

Children Who “Don’t Quite Tick the Boxes”

There is a significant gap for children who do not neatly meet thresholds. Those considered “not severe enough” for specialist placement but unable to cope in unsupported mainstream settings are left struggling.

There appears to be no meaningful SEN bridge between schools for these children.

My son was placed on a long-term reduced timetable at six years old because appropriate provision was not in place. He remained on that reduced timetable until Year 2. He is now almost seven and only recently has full-time education with full-time 1:1 support.

That prolonged period of reduced education during formative years had a detrimental impact on him educationally, socially, and emotionally. Reduced timetables caused by lack of provision are not neutral interventions — they are a consequence of systemic failure.

Mental Health Impact on Families

The cumulative impact on families is severe. Parents are forced to become advocates, coordinators, and often legal representatives for their children simply to secure statutory support.

The sustained pressure of caring full-time for a child with additional needs, while fighting for assessments and provision, has led to widespread mental health deterioration among families I speak to. Parents report anxiety, depression, burnout, and breakdowns.

I personally experienced a breakdown as a direct result of the prolonged stress and lack of support. This was not caused by my child’s needs — it was caused by the continuous battle to access help.

Families should not have to reach crisis point before support is recognised.

Carer Assessments and Thresholds for Help

Following my first carer’s assessment, I was told I did not require support because I was managing to care for my son, maintain my home, shop, and fulfil daily responsibilities.

But what choice does a parent have?

If I did not do those things, I would be neglecting my child. The ability to function at a basic survival level should not be interpreted as absence of need. It reflects resilience under pressure, not wellbeing.

The current approach appears reactive rather than preventative, with support only triggered when collapse occurs.

Conclusion

Across the parent community I support, the same themes repeatedly arise:

Invisible disabilities minimised.

Diagnosis used inconsistently to gatekeep services.

Specialist Children's Services denying support both with and without diagnosis.

Educational psychology recommendations being overridden without transparent justification.

Children left on reduced timetables due to lack of provision.

Carers deemed "coping" until they break.

Significant and escalating mental health harm to families.

The law is clear. The lived experience suggests implementation is not.

I respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether a broader review into cross-service implementation, accountability, and placement decision-making is required to ensure that children receive support based on assessed need — consistently, lawfully, and without avoidable harm to families.

Thank you for your continued consideration.

Kind regards

Danielle Jones

Dear Petitions Committee,

I wish to make one further clarification regarding my petition.

Everything described in the Cabinet Secretary's response — needs-led provision, person-centred practice, inclusion, and support not being dependent on diagnosis — is already clearly enshrined in legislation and statutory guidance under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the ALN Code.

The issue raised in this petition is not the absence of law.

It is the failure of consistent implementation, oversight, and enforcement.

Families are not asking for new rights. We are asking for the rights that already exist to be applied lawfully and consistently in practice.

When legislation is strong but lived experience repeatedly contradicts it, this indicates a significant gap between policy intention and operational reality. That gap is where children and families are being harmed.

I respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether scrutiny should focus not on whether the framework is sufficient, but on whether it is being properly delivered.

Kind regards

Danielle Jones

Dear Petitions Committee,

I would also like to draw attention to the growing mental health crisis among parents and caregivers of children with Additional Learning Needs.

Within the parent networks I am part of, exhaustion, burnout, anxiety and depression are widespread. Families are operating in a constant state of advocacy — fighting for assessments, challenging refusals, managing reduced timetables, coordinating between services, and providing full-time care without adequate respite.

There have been reported cases nationally of parents taking their own lives following prolonged battles to secure support for their children. While every situation is complex, systemic stress, isolation, and lack of timely support are recurring themes raised in public reporting and parent communities.

When a system intended to protect vulnerable children results in severe mental health deterioration for caregivers, this should be treated as a safeguarding concern.

Caregivers need preventative support, access to respite, and recognition within the wider ALN framework. A system that only intervenes when families reach crisis point is neither sustainable nor humane.

The wellbeing of children cannot be separated from the wellbeing of those caring for them.

I respectfully ask the Committee to consider whether sufficient attention is being given to the mental health impact of systemic barriers on families, and whether caregiver support mechanisms require urgent review.

I would also like to highlight the mental and emotional impact on children themselves when support is delayed, denied, or inconsistently applied.

Children with Additional Learning Needs are already more vulnerable to anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional dysregulation. When they experience repeated refusal of support, prolonged reduced timetables, exclusion from activities, or environments that are not inclusive of neurodivergence, this compounds their distress.

Children are acutely aware when they are treated as "the problem." Being removed from class, placed on reduced hours, denied placements recommended by professionals, or excluded from community spaces can significantly affect a child's confidence, sense of belonging, and long-term relationship with education.

Early experiences of exclusion or unmet need during formative years can have lasting consequences on mental health, attendance, and attainment.

When children are left without appropriate provision because they "do not quite meet thresholds," or because services are delayed pending diagnosis, the message they internalise is often that their needs are not valid.

This is not a neutral outcome. It is a developmental risk.

If the ALN framework is to be genuinely needs-led, the psychological wellbeing of children must be considered as central — not secondary — to educational provision decisions.

I respectfully ask also that the Committee can consider the cumulative mental health impact on children, when statutory support is not delivered in a timely and consistent manner

Kind regards,

Danielle Jones