

## **Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2223](#): Allow parents of children with additional support needs to use their local authority education funding to access alternative education, including private schools, forest schools and other alternative provision, lodged by Karmen Boyd**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

The petition raises several issues:

- funding of school education
- provision additional support for learning
- parental choice.

### **Funding of school education**

Local authorities are responsible for securing the provision of education in their areas. The majority of funding for school education comes from local authorities' core budgets. Scottish Government grants form a large part of the financing of local government. The number of pupils in an area forms part of how the Scottish Government allocates local government funding among the 32 local authorities in Scotland.

It is a matter for the local authority to determine how it spends its budgets across a range of services, including education, to best meet local needs. Average costs per pupil vary from local authority to local authority. Factors such as rurality, deprivation and levels and types of additional support needs can affect the resources required at a school level. The number of pupils in a school will also be a factor in the funding for a school (affecting the number of teachers/staff, size of the building, level of other services etc.), but funding to schools will not be on a strict per-pupil basis. The marginal cost of an additional pupil could be much lower than the average cost per pupil if, for example, no additional staff were required.

[Local authorities have a duty](#) to “secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education”. For primary and secondary education, this duty is normally fulfilled through local authority-run schools. Local authorities can secure the provision of education through other means, and this can include paying for a place at a private school – in

practice, this would normally be a private special school to meet the needs of a child with complex additional support needs.

The petitioner mentions approaches in Scandinavia. For example, municipalities in Sweden fund independent schools and parents/carers may choose to send their children to state or grant-aided independent schools. Grant-aided independent schools are generally not permitted to charge additional fees ([Eurydice. Sweden: Funding in education](#)).

## Provision of additional support for learning

Local authorities have duties to meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs. [SPICe published a briefing on Additional Support for Learning in June 2026](#). Members may wish to refer to that briefing.

## Parental choice

The June 2026 SPICe briefing includes a section on [parental choice](#) and placing requests. Local authorities must agree to placing requests unless certain grounds are met. For a child with additional support needs, placing requests can be made to independent special schools.

## Key Organisations and relevant links

- COSLA
- Teaching unions
- Connect

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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