

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 10 September 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2215: Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools

Introduction

Petitioner Kirsty Solman

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create and enforce a national anti-bullying policy that all schools and local authorities must follow, with mandatory reporting procedures and stronger consequences to ensure the safety and protection of children affected by bullying.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2215>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 18 June 2026.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 234 signatures have been received on this petition.
4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2215: Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools

Petitioner

Kirsty Solman

Date Published

18 June 2026

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to create and enforce a national anti-bullying policy that all schools and local authorities must follow, with mandatory reporting procedures and stronger consequences to ensure the safety and protection of children affected by bullying.

Previous action

I have repeatedly raised concerns with my child's school regarding ongoing bullying and the lack of effective safeguarding in place. This has included meetings, written communication, and requests for stronger protective measures.

I have written to MSPs and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to raise wider concerns about the lack of a national policy and the inconsistency across local authorities. No commitment has been made to create a national, enforceable approach.

Background information

Although the Scottish Government has produced guidance—most notably Respect for All—this guidance is not statutory and does not create a uniform, enforceable standard across all schools and local authorities.

The impact of bullying on young people can be significant and long-lasting. Many children experience anxiety, depression, trauma, sleep difficulties, and declining academic performance.

Children with additional support needs (ASN) are particularly vulnerable.

This highlights the need for a national framework that empowers schools and ensures accountability.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2215](#): Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools, lodged by Kirsty Solman

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

Responsibility for the provision of school education primarily sits with local authorities. In addition, schools themselves are, generally, able to determine school-level policies over a range of issues. This could include how to support positive behaviours.

The [national policy intention](#) is that policies and approaches at all levels are developed in a collegial way that includes engagement with a range of parties, including parents/carers and pupils.

The petition appears to be calling for two things:

- a consistent and mandatory policy across all schools
- for that policy to include “stronger consequences to ensure the safety and protection of children affected by bullying”.

Autonomy and consistency

Under the first bullet, one option would be to create the power for the Scottish Government to issue ‘statutory guidance’. This normally means that the public body, the local authority in this instance, would have a duty to ‘have regard’ to the statutory guidance while carrying out certain duties or tasks. This is short of a duty to follow the guidance in all circumstances, but a local authority would be expected to show good reasons for not following statutory guidance.

The Scottish Government can be reluctant to be too prescriptive in its approach to school education. Generally, the approach is to try to support local decision-makers to determine their own policies to best reflect their school communities.

Nevertheless, there are examples of the Government seeking to ensure consistency of local authorities’ and schools’ policies across Scotland, for example in relation to the use of mobile phones.

Approaches to supporting positive behaviour in schools and anti-bullying guidance and support

During the last session of Parliament, concerns about the behaviour of pupils in schools was a prominent part of the debates around school education. The Scottish Government identified improving behaviour as one of its priorities (See: “A-B-Cs –

Attainment, Attendance, Behaviour and Relationships, and the Curriculum". [2026 National Improvement Framework.](#))

In 2024, the [Scottish Government and COSLA produced a joint action plan on relationships and behaviour in schools](#) covering 2024 to 2027. This stated:

“Positive outcomes are most evidenced in a relational style characterised by high warmth and support, high standards and high expectations of socially responsible behaviour, and an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour, ensuring effective implementation of values, and expectations in a firm and consistent manner while using reprimands and consequences when necessary.”

The aims of the action plan included ensuring that all pupils “feel safe and supported in their learning environment” and that parents/carers are involved in “the development and implementation of policies about relationships, behaviour and support in schools”.

Part of the action plan was to revise the suite of national guidance on behaviour and relationships. New guidance on [Fostering a positive, inclusive and safe school environment](#) was published in June 2025. Refreshed guidance on [attendance](#) was published in March 2026.

The national anti-bullying guidance [Respect for All](#) was updated and published in 2024. This is intended to support settings to develop local policies. It includes guidance on what policies should include and how the policies should be developed. This includes engaging with pupils, parents and staff.

Respect for All also includes [guidance on implementing anti-bullying policies](#). This highlights preventative approaches and the importance of the culture and ethos in the school. The guidance covers reporting and recording of incidents and how settings should respond to those incidences of bullying. It notes that both the child or young person experiencing bullying and the child or young person displaying bullying behaviours may need support. It said:

“All responses to alleged bullying incidents should be child-centred and reviewed individually, rooted firmly in the values of rights, fairness, respect, equality and inclusion. Consideration should be given to how to support the child or young person experiencing the bullying behaviour, and also the person displaying this behaviour, to prevent similar behaviour happening in the future.

...

“Schools and organisations should be clear on how they will communicate their response to all relevant parties (children and young people involved and their parent(s)). There may be instances where privacy concerns relating to the other child or young person involved means information cannot be shared with the person affected. This lack of information may make the child or young person affected, or their family members, feel that nothing has been done in response to the incident. In such instances the need to respect privacy should be explained and reassurance given that corrective action has been taken.”

The guidance is non-statutory. Nevertheless, one would expect local authorities and schools to be aware of the guidance and use it when developing their policies and approaches.

The Scottish Government funds [RespectMe](#). This aims to “to build the capacity of adults to effect change and challenge bullying and stigma at an individual, school, family, community, and societal level.” RespectMe provides guidance and training.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- His Majesty’s Inspector of Education
- Teaching Unions
- Connect
- Scottish Youth Parliament
- RespectMe

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
August 2026

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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2215: Introduce a Statutory National Anti-Bullying Policy and Strengthen Consequences for Bullying in Scottish Schools

Scottish Government written submission, 31 July 2026

1. Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable?

The Scottish Government recognises the significant and lasting impact bullying can have on children and young people's wellbeing, attendance, learning and attainment, particularly for children with additional support needs. Bullying is not and must never be, tolerated.

The delivery of education is the statutory responsibility of local authorities. The Scottish Government's role is to provide national leadership by setting the strategic direction, national expectations, guidance and funding, while allowing local authorities and schools the flexibility to respond to the individual needs and circumstances of their children and young people.

Scotland already has a national anti-bullying approach through Respect for All, the national anti-bullying guidance, which was last updated in 2024. Respect for All sets clear expectations for policy and practice in preventing and responding to bullying. This includes guidance around recording and monitoring bullying incidents, making clear that all reported incidents of bullying should be recorded, monitored and dealt with locally. All schools and local authorities are expected to develop and implement local anti-bullying policies consistent with the national framework.

Our approach to anti-bullying is also supported by wider work to address online harms and promote healthy relationships with digital technology. We are taking action to end the presence of personal mobile phones in schools as part of a wider public health approach to online harms. The Scottish Government does not currently have the power to introduce statutory national anti-bullying guidance or mandatory reporting, nor do we consider this would necessarily improve outcomes for children and young people.

A statutory recording system would require a fixed legal definition of bullying. However, Scotland's approach recognises that bullying is both behaviour and impact, and that whether behaviour constitutes bullying depends on the experience of the child or young person affected. Introducing a rigid statutory definition risks excluding behaviours or circumstances that should receive an appropriate response simply because they fall outside a legal definition.

In addition, legislation requiring national reporting could create unintended consequences. Public comparison of recorded incidents between schools or local authorities could encourage inappropriate use of data as performance measures rather than supporting improvement. The current position of our guidance is that all reports of bullying should be recorded, rather than only once an allegation is substantiated. There is a risk that concerns about reputational impact could

discourage consistent recording, reducing rather than improving confidence in national data.

Evidence does not demonstrate that legislating alone leads to reductions in bullying or improved recording practices. International experience suggests that jurisdictions with anti-bullying legislation continue to experience similar prevalence of bullying to countries using non-statutory approaches. Research indicates that outcomes are more strongly influenced by implementation, staff training, school culture and effective intervention than by legislative requirements alone.

The Scottish Government therefore believes that strengthening implementation of national guidance, ensuring schools and local authorities respond and promoting consistent practice is more likely to improve outcomes. This work is complemented by broader action being taken through the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan and the emerging public health approach to online harms.

The Scottish Government's guidance is clear that bullying behaviour should always be addressed appropriately and proportionately, with responses aimed at supporting those affected by bullying, addressing the underlying reasons for behaviour and preventing recurrence. Consequences are an important part of the range of responses available to schools and should be applied where appropriate. Decisions about the most suitable response are best made locally by schools, exercising professional judgement based on the individual circumstances of each case.

Scotland's anti-bullying approach has been recognised internationally for its rights-based approach, placing the wellbeing and experiences of children and young people at the centre of decision making. The approach is underpinned by the UNCRC and recognises that preventing bullying requires whole-school culture change.

2. What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

Respect for All was revised in November 2024 following extensive engagement with a working group made up of ADES, COSLA, Education Scotland, teaching unions, *respectme*, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Glasgow City Council, a parents' representative and children's organisations. The updated guidance provided greater clarity on what constitutes bullying and strengthened expectations around recording and monitoring incidents, responding to prejudice-based and online bullying, supporting children and young people who experience bullying, addressing bullying behaviour and the factors contributing to it, and promoting whole-school approaches to prevention.

To support implementation, a number of learning sessions were delivered for practitioners and school staff, including a session on the key changes within the guidance and training sessions on the use of the Bullying and Equalities Module within SEEMiS to support consistent recording and monitoring of bullying incidents.

We continue to fully fund *respectme*, Scotland's anti-bullying service, which work with all adults who have a role to play in the lives of children and young people to

give them the practical skills and confidence to deal with bullying behaviour, wherever it occurs. *respectme* offer support to local authorities to develop and implement their local anti-bullying policies aligned to Respect for All.

Following publication of the revised guidance, *respectme* developed a template anti-bullying policy for local authorities and continues to provide a range of free professional learning opportunities, including e-learning aligned with the principles and expectations set out in Respect for All. *respectme* also delivers its reward programme, which supports schools to review, strengthen and gain recognition for effective anti-bullying policy and practice, helping to embed whole-school approaches aligned with the principles of Respect for All.

Our approach to anti-bullying is supported by our broader work to promote positive relationships in schools, currently being taken forward as part of the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan 2024-27. The [action plan](#) was published in August 2024 as part of our response to the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2023. The action plan is jointly owned with COSLA, given the statutory responsibility for the delivery of education rests with our councils. The then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills worked with members of the [Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools \(SAGRABIS\)](#) on the development of this plan.

As part of this work, we are taking action to end the presence of personal mobile phones in schools. This forms part of a wider public health approach to online harms, focused on creating environments that support children and young people's wellbeing, learning and relationships. Further, as part of the delivery of the action plan, in June 2025, the Scottish Government published guidance on [fostering a positive, inclusive, and safe school environment](#). The guidance makes clear that high standards, clear boundaries and consequences are absolutely essential to creating safe and supportive school environments. It sets out a wide range of possible responses to behaviour – from classroom-based strategies to the use of exclusion where appropriate and as a last resort – while supporting staff to exercise professional judgement informed by individual context and need. This national approach is founded on prevention, de-escalation of concerns and supporting positive relationships.

Alongside this, new [guidance on risk assessments for violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour](#) was also published in June 2025. This guidance supports schools to appropriately use risk assessment processes to mitigate or minimise violent, aggressive, and dangerous behaviours exhibited by children and young people at school. Risk assessments should only be applied in situations where there is a foreseeable risk of harm occurring or a pattern of behaviour that causes, or is likely to cause, harm to self or others. Both these publications support schools to respond effectively to behaviour.

In addition, work is currently underway to develop a set of national principles to support greater consistency in recording and monitoring incidents across local authorities and schools. These principles will be published in the coming months. This work seeks to improve consistency while avoiding the unintended consequences associated with statutory recording requirements.

We have committed to reviewing and updating Respect for All every 5 years. The next update is due to be published in 2029. As part of this process, we will engage with key stakeholders from across education, local government and the third sector to consider the effectiveness of the guidance and identify any further improvements required.

Health and Wellbeing Unit
Workforce, Quality and Wellbeing Division