

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 24 September 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

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

Introduction

Petitioner Karmen Boyd

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to allow parents of children with ASN to allocate their child's local authority education allowance to offset the cost of alternative education through private schools, forest schools and alternative provision.

This model is already in use in many Scandinavian countries.

This change would give parents more choice and the option to top up the rest if required.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2223>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 2 July 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, 620 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 submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are 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

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

Petitioner:

Karmen Boyd

Date published:

2 July 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to allow parents of children with ASN to allocate their child's local authority education allowance to offset the cost of alternative education through private schools, forest schools and alternative provision.

This model is already in use in many Scandinavian countries.

This change would give parents more choice and the option to top up the rest if required.

Background information:

Our family member, we suspect, is autistic. In August he is due to start our excellent local school. They will make some accommodations to support him but likely he will be very unhappy there and won't learn much.

We can flexi school or home school or send him to school and risk his mental health and future attainment.

Many children with additional support needs such as his need a smaller, calmer, more structured environment or an alternative approach, which is not possible in an overcrowded classroom.

The local authority has a responsibility to educate these children not to cause them distress and physical harm.

The money could go towards providing a better setting for the child and parents could top up the cost.

Scandinavian countries have a variety of schools to choose from as standard-language immersion, Montessori, Steiner, Arts etc and heavily subsidise private schooling to make it accessible for all.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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

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

PE2223/A: 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

Scottish Government written submission, 13 August 2026

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that every child and young person receives the support they need to reach their full potential. We recognise the concerns raised by families whose children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) may not feel that their needs are being fully met within their current educational provision.

Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, local authorities have a statutory duty to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of children and young people for whose education they are responsible. Local authorities retain responsibility for securing an appropriate education and for determining how public resources are allocated to meet individual needs.

The Scottish Government recognises that children and young people benefit from a range of educational approaches and learning environments. Across Scotland, local authorities already make use of a variety of provision, including mainstream schools, specialist provisions, outreach services, nurture approaches, outdoor learning, and placements in independent or grant-aided special schools where this is assessed as necessary to meet a child's needs.

The petition proposes that funding allocated by local authorities for a child with ASN should be made directly available to parents to purchase alternative educational provision, including private schools, forest schools and other non-local authority settings. While we understand the intention behind this proposal, there are significant considerations that would require careful examination.

These include:

- Ensuring equitable access to education for all children and young people, regardless of family circumstances or geographical location;
- Maintaining appropriate oversight of public expenditure and ensuring value for money, including those achieved through economies of scale;
- Ensuring that all educational settings receiving public funding meet appropriate standards of quality, safeguarding, inclusion and accountability;
- Clarifying responsibilities for assessment, planning, monitoring and reviewing support for children and young people with ASN;
- Understanding the potential impact on local authority services and the wider education system.

The Scottish Government's position is that decisions about educational placements should continue to be based on the assessed needs of the child or young person and made within the existing framework established by legislation. Parents already have rights in relation to placing requests, mediation, dispute resolution and references to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal for Scotland in certain circumstances, where they feel that their child or young person's needs are not being met.

We acknowledge, however, that many families continue to report challenges in accessing timely and appropriate support. The Scottish Government remains committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with ASN through ongoing work with local authorities, education providers, parents, carers and third-sector organisations.

Within the first 100-days of this Parliament, we have committed to developing a timeline and route-map for a national staged intervention model which aims to reduce inconsistency and variability of support across Scotland. A longer-term programme of data improvement was launched in December 2025, aiming to improve the consistency and quality of recording additional support needs for children and young people. This work will help schools and local authorities understand the needs of children and young people more clearly and to plan more effectively for their needs.

While the Scottish Government does not currently support the introduction of a system that would automatically transfer local authority education funding directly to parents for alternative educational provision, we recognise the importance of ensuring that the full range of educational options available to meet individual needs is considered where appropriate. We remain committed to working with partners to ensure that children and young people with additional support needs receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

The Scottish Government thanks the petitioner for raising this important issue. We recognise the strength of feeling among families who seek greater flexibility in educational provision for children and young people with additional support needs. We will continue to engage with stakeholders and consider evidence on how best to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people across Scotland's education system.

Scottish Government

PE2223/B: 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

Petitioner written submission, 14 September 2026

43% of children are reported as having an additional support need in Scottish schools. Children's education is being left in jeopardy and while there are a number of policies and practices on the table none of them are addressing the very real lived experience of handing over your disabled child each day to a school with no

knowledge or understanding of their disability and hoping for the best. This is what every parent of an additional support needs child is being asked to do.

There is no national training programme for educators around neurodiversity and disability nor is there any form of grading and marking of how additional support needs 'friendly' a school is. Nobody is checking up on schools or asking parents of ASN children how it's going. Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) have no training yet spend an inordinate amount of time with disabled children. There are no criteria for care. There is no oversight. We just hand off our vulnerable children at the door and that's it. Only the very few even get a legally binding care plan.

Calm, quiet, structured, accessible - none of these words are adjectives anyone would use to describe today's Scottish mainstream schools. Yet they are the setting you would use to describe a perfect school for many disabled children. We do have these schools, but they are private schools who have the staff, training and numbers to keep it calm, quiet and structured. So why can't we give our most vulnerable children this?

I see that rights to placing requests and support for conflict resolution and tribunal are mentioned in the Scottish Government's response. None of these are fast, none of them are without considerable stress and none of them are proactive. Getting the setting right before placing the child should be prioritised because many neurodivergent children struggle with change. Moving children about until you get the right fit will just increase the symptoms of their disability. The parental stress involved in all of this can also not be discounted as a very human cost.

Outside of 'special' schooling for children with complex needs there is really only 'mainstream'. Many children do not meet the requirements for and do not need 'special' provision or support bases. They need structured, accessible, calm and quiet. Placing requests really just offer you the option to move from one overcrowded, loud, overstimulating environment to another (if there's even space). The use of ear defenders, PSA's to babysit and nurture rooms are not inclusion. They are just another form of exclusion. These children are literally not in the room a lot of the time. The environment in Scottish schools is not conducive to an appropriate or efficient education for anyone let alone children who are harmed just by being in that environment. It's traumatic and damaging.

While it may not cost the school operationally more for that one additional support needs child the wider cost for that child and that family is exorbitant.

- A parent who can no longer work because the child can't cope at school;
- Constant overwhelm and absences to recover;
- Stress from constant calls from the school, meetings at the school, worry for their child;
- The child regressing due to the stress incurred at school
- The long-term mental health implications for the parents and child (Nhs)

- The daily distress of the child.

Using the cost of that 'one more child' is a shortsighted and ridiculous way to quantify the cost of human suffering.

This petition is asking for choices to be made available. If not directly to the parents then identify schools that are an option for parents of ASN children. We know them best and have a lot more information about what will work for them. However, there's no information on local schools to base that on.

You could:

Follow the Scandinavian models of different types of schools publicly funded and available to all (Montessori, Steiner, Waldorf, Arts, Language immersion, etc) or look at the Danish model where 80% of private schooling is paid by the government and 20% by the parents or make paying for education illegal like in Sweden. All would be better than what is currently happening in Scottish schools.

Children do have a right to be educated in a setting that does not cause them harm. This is not being provided in any systematic way in the whole of Scotland and parents are being forced to choose between falling into financial ruin and risking their child's health and wellbeing.

I'm going to use the example of my 5 year old family member here. He lasted 1.5 days. He is currently not in school. We have no choices for him.