

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1820](#)

Main Petitioner: Sameena Javed

Subject: Compulsory bereavement education in schools

Calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce compulsory bereavement education into the school curriculum.

Introduction

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to introduce compulsory bereavement education into the school curriculum.

The petitioner believes teaching children about this might make bereavement and death easier to understand and deal with. Following the unexpected death of her 13 year old son in 2017, [the petitioner is campaigning](#) for the introduction of education around bereavement and has also lodged [another petition](#) on full body scans for neonates in Scotland.

Bereavement and the curriculum

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is Scotland's 3-18 curriculum. While very little of CfE's content is statutory, [Health and Wellbeing](#) is a defined curriculum area and [one of the outcomes in this area is:](#)

I am learning skills and strategies which will support me in challenging times, particularly in relation to change and loss.

The charity Child Bereavement UK's Scotland Development Project is working in partnership with education, health and social care services, bereavement service and other organisations in Scotland to coordinate support and raise awareness on the issue of bereavement. The charity's website highlights [Resilience Project: Educating and Supporting Children around Death, Dying and Bereavement](#) as a helpful resource for schools. The resource was developed by the Universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde in collaboration with Strathcarron Hospice, and St Francis Xavier's RC Primary School in Falkirk. The project consists of five lessons aimed at children aged between 9 and 12 covering death, loss and grief and is in line with learning outcomes identified in CfE.

In their [2019 journal article on bereavement training for school communities](#), Dr Sally Paul of the University of Strathclyde and Elaine McManus of Strathcarron Hospice reported on an evaluation of bereavement training offered to eight schools in Scotland. The findings suggested that school staff attending training found it useful in responding to the needs of bereaved children.

The evaluation concludes that “the role and expertise of schools in supporting bereaved children is underdeveloped”, but that “participating in a short and targeted training programme can develop the self-perceived confidence of school staff around engaging with bereaved children”.

[Statistics from Child Bereavement UK](#) find that:

- 1 in 29 5-16 year olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling - that's a child in every average class.
- Around 23,600 parents of children under 18 die per year in the UK.

Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government Actions

School-based counselling

The Scottish Government has allocated [£60 million over four financial years](#) to fund up to 350 additional counsellors in schools. Counselling services will be available in every secondary school and for all pupils aged 10 and over.

Responses to Parliamentary questions indicate the Scottish Government still plans to deliver this by September 2020, as planned before the COVID-19 pandemic. In an answer to a written question (S5W-30083, 1 July 2020), Mr Swinney said:

“From September 2020, school counselling services will be available to all primary, secondary and special school pupils age 10 and over; and is part of a range of services that schools may have in place to support the mental, emotional and social wellbeing of children and young people.”

While counselling services will not directly address the issue of bereavement education for all pupils, counselling services will be able to provide support to pupils impacted by bereavement.

Resources for parents

Education Scotland’s Parentzone has links to [resources for parents and carers of children coping with bereavement](#). These focus on building resilience for children impacted by loss.

Other relevant support

In response to a Written Question on care and support for bereaved people, the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing Joe Fitzpatrick said in February this year:

[Question S5W-27228: Johann Lamont, Glasgow, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 03/02/2020](#)

To ask the Scottish Government what action it takes to ensure that bereaved people receive appropriate care and support.

Answered by Joe FitzPatrick (04/03/2020):

The Scottish Government recognises the impact bereavement can have on people's lives and is taking forward work to improve the care available for people experiencing bereavement. However, it is important to recognise bereavement support should be reflective of the circumstances of the individual and their family.

There is therefore a broad spectrum of work underway across Scottish Government to support people who have experienced a bereavement. These include:

- Work across NHS Scotland to improve training and education for staff, patients, families and carers. Led by NHS Education Scotland, education resources and a bespoke "Support Around Death" website for professionals are in place.
- Our Suicide Prevention Action Plan: Every Life Matters, contains an action to develop a Scottish Crisis Care Agreement to help ensure that timely and effective support for those affected by suicide is available across Scotland.
- Promoting bereavement support and information for those affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby. We have provided funding to develop the National Bereavement Care Pathway (NBCP), led by Sands UK, in Scotland. Sands UK are working in collaboration with other charities, Royal Colleges and bereaved parents to develop the pathway. There will be five experiences of pregnancy or baby loss included in the NBCP which are miscarriage, termination of pregnancy for fetal anomaly, stillbirth, neonatal death and the sudden unexpected death of an infant.
- The establishment of more efficient and receptive support services around services for bereaved children and young people are being taken forward through the work associated with appointing a childhood bereavement coordinator.
- Taking forward work via the auspices of the Mental Health Strategy, to help ensure that people have good mental health and that agencies act early enough when issues such as grief and bereavement emerge.

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September 2020**

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