

## **P-05-722 Protect Special Educational Needs – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Chair, 06.12.16**

Dear Chair,

Thank you for forwarding me correspondence from the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, and for inviting me to respond.

My first observation is that if my experience and the experiences of other parents with autistic children is commonplace, then the system as outlined by the minister does not work on the ground – and it most certainly doesn't work in Neath Port Talbot. Each year, we are all forced into the frankly inhumane process of competing against one another so that our children are given placements. I have heard many of them say again and again that it is harder to secure proper arrangements for their children than it is to care for them. This means that the system is not fit for purpose. At the end of the day, services are supposed to be for service users, not for the benefit of those who run them.

I also believe the system is open to abuse. Increasing funding across the board doesn't mean that ALL local authorities have spent more. I note that the minister does not elaborate on what each local authorities spend on autism services/SENs. If there was, say, a sharp rise in spending in Cardiff but a drop in Neath Port Talbot, then that would make the figures look good but at the end of the day it doesn't mean an end to the problems that parents like myself are facing.

While any increase in funding is welcome, is it enough to meet the need? This has to be the fundamental question for the Welsh Government as funding provider – is the money doing the job?

To that end, how does the Welsh Government test and measure whether its funding is meeting the outcome? It may be for local authorities to decide how to spend it, but it is the job of the Welsh Government, as funding provider, to ensure that money is properly spent. I see no evidence of that in this correspondence.

Lastly, the minister mentions the forthcoming Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill, but gives no reassurances that the concerns that have driven this petition will be addressed in this legislation. Consequently, it would not make sense for me to withdraw the petition on the basis of the scant information provided in the minister's correspondence.

Kindest Regards

Nicola Butterfield