

PE1820/B

Petitioner submission of 16 September 2020

I would like to provide this written submission in response to the submission from the Scottish Government about this petition.

The Scottish Government states that although it is not statutory, there is a wide range of resources and support available to schools to enable them to teach children about death and bereavement. This may well be the case, but both from personal experience and from speaking to others, it appears that the topic of death and bereavement is still not being widely taught in our schools. Young people I know have certainly not been taught anything in relation to this topic and nothing appears to have significantly changed in the three years since we lost our son. If the comments in support of this petition are read and noted, it will become obvious that a lot of people also feel that bereavement education is not being widely taught in Scotland's schools. Many schools appear to be lacking the basic resources to teach this topic, and there have been instances where parents themselves have had to personally provide resources so that this topic can be taught to their children. Surely such an important topic – one which will affect everyone at some point – should be a requirement in the school curriculum and not left to individual schools to decide whether to teach it or not? It should be given equal importance with reading, writing and arithmetic.

This leads to the next question. Why are many schools choosing not to teach about death and bereavement? Are the teachers not trained to deliver this type of education? Are the resources simply not there, contrary to what we have been told in the submission from the Scottish Government? Whatever the reason, this needs to change. Bereavement education should be made compulsory, not statutory. It is simply not enough to inform schools that they can choose to teach this if they wish to do so. Schools should *have* to teach it and special training should be provided to teaching staff so they are equipped to teach such a topic. Otherwise, bring in trained counsellors to do this. Yes, it is a very sensitive and difficult topic, but so are many others that are being taught in our schools. The taboo surrounding this topic needs to be broken and the best way to do that is through delivering bereavement education in Scotland's schools. It is all very well setting out all the framework and guidelines for schools, but what is the point if most schools are choosing not to follow these guidelines and aren't actively teaching children about death and bereavement? However sad it may be, the reality is that death is a part of life and just as children are taught about birth, they should be taught about death as well. It will help to prepare our children for the harsh realities of life.

In summary, despite what is stated in the Scottish Government submission, it appears that bereavement education is still not being taught in a large number of our schools. The comments on the petition support this statement. Bereavement education in our schools needs to be compulsory and not statutory. Death is something that will affect everyone and our children need to be taught about it accordingly.