

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2091](#): ‘Provide funding to have a CAMHS worker and a nurse based within Scottish high schools’, lodged by Kirsty Solman on behalf of Stand with Kyle Now

[PE2091](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide funding to enable a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) worker and a school nurse to be placed within secondary schools. The petitioner represents [Stand with Kyle Now](#), a charity that offers mental health support to children.

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

CAMHS professionals in schools

The petition calls for the introduction of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) workers and nurses in secondary schools, to enable early identification of children in need of mental health support, and ensure that children are referred to appropriate services. A range of healthcare professionals fall under [the umbrella of CAMHS workers](#), including psychiatrists, social workers, and other mental health practitioners such as counsellors.

The Scottish Government’s [2018-19 Programme for Government](#) committed to increasing the provision of counsellors in schools. Local authorities are responsible for implementing school counselling services in line with [Scottish Government guidance](#), and the Scottish Government provided funding to support this provision. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills [confirmed in September 2023](#) that school counselling services are available in all local authorities for children aged 10 and over.

The delivery of these services [can vary across local authorities](#). Some local authorities may assign a counsellor to a specific school, or divide their time between multiple schools within a locality. Other local authorities may provide an authority-wide service, rather than allocating practitioners to particular schools or areas. In practice, this means that although each school has

access to counselling support, a counsellor may not always be situated within an individual school.

A 2023 [report by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland](#) (CYPCS) identified further barriers to accessing school counselling services, including a lack of provision outwith school hours and term time. The report also found that many local authorities require input from teachers and other professionals when deciding whether a pupil is eligible for counselling, creating another potential barrier to access.

The [most recent data available](#), covering the period from July – December 2022, showed that 546 counsellors were in post across Scotland's local authorities, an increase from 405 during the same period in 2021. This data relates to the number of staff in post, rather than the number of FTE posts. When reporting to the Scottish Government, some local authorities noted that their school counselling services were operating at capacity, and that there was a high demand for the service.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills acknowledged that the Scottish Government [does not currently monitor waiting times](#) for accessing school counselling services, as the service is delivered at local authority level. The [2023 CYPCS report](#) found that only three local authorities had established waiting time targets for access to school counselling, and that some pupils had waited for up to three months to access counselling. The report recommended that all local authorities should have clear waiting time targets, and that compliance with the targets should be part of the Scottish Government's evaluation of the services.

School nurses

[School nurses are](#) specialist public health nurses who provide health and wellbeing support to school age children. The role is usually held by registered nurses or midwives who have completed an additional qualification in school nursing. School nursing services are managed at NHS Board, Integrated Joint Board, or Health and Social Care Partnership level, and service delivery can vary according to local need. School nurses may be assigned to areas or school clusters rather than an individual school.

In 2018, the Scottish Government [refocused the role of Scotland's school nurses](#) to focus on ten key priority areas:

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Substance Misuse
- Child Protection
- Domestic Abuse
- Looked after children

- Homelessness
- Youth Justice
- Young Carers
- Sexual Health
- Transitions

The Scottish Government [has invested £34 million since 2018](#) to increase the school nursing workforce. An additional 216.6 full-time equivalent school nurses have been recruited during this period.

CAMHS waiting times

The petition states that children are currently waiting up to two years for appointments with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). [Public Health Scotland's most recent data](#) from October-December 2023 states that 3.4% of patients awaiting CAMHS treatment during this period had been waiting for 53 weeks or longer. This is a slight increase from 2.8% the previous quarter, but a reduction from 9.6% from October-December 2022. School counsellors are able to refer pupils to CAMHS and other support services; counsellors completed [374 onward referrals to CAMHS](#) between July and December 2022.

Scottish Government actions

As referenced above, the Scottish Government committed in 2018 to increasing provision of school nurses, and refocusing their role to better support the mental wellbeing of pupils. The Scottish Government aimed to recruit an additional 250 school nurses by the end of 2022. An additional 216.6 full-time equivalent staff [were recruited over this period](#). The Scottish Government provides [£16 million funding to local authorities](#) annually to support the provision of school counsellors.

Scottish Parliament actions

The Parliament's Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee conducted an inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people, and [published its report in May 2022](#). The report explored a number of factors impacting on the mental health of children and young people, including the pandemic, socioeconomic inequality, and experience of care. The Committee welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring the provision of school counsellors for all secondary schools, and emphasised the importance of effective evaluation of the service. The report also highlighted the role of school nurses in tackling the adversity faced by some children in secondary schools.

The report further noted that supporting the mental wellbeing of school pupils requires a whole systems approach, and recommended that the Scottish Government consider dedicated mental health training for teachers. In [its response to the report](#), the Scottish Government stated that [a professional learning resource](#) had been developed for all school staff. The resource seeks to provide all school staff with knowledge of mental health and wellbeing in schools, as part of a whole school approach to promoting mental wellbeing for pupils.

Sarah Swift

Researcher

3 May 2024

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.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP