



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

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Helen Jones MP
Petitions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

24 January 2018

Dear Helen

Thank you for your letter of 10 January about an e-petition entitled "Make bullying a criminal offence". I am sorry you feel my department's response failed to respond to the petitioners' direct requests.

In response to your first concern, about acknowledging the death of the petitioner's son, we have updated the response to take this into account. I would like to reassure you that we do take seriously the tragic circumstances which have led to this petition. In a 2016 Westminster Hall debate held about this case the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years, Caroline Dinenage, personally expressed her condolences and deepest sympathies to Brandon's family and friends.

In response to your second concern about gaps in current laws and procedures relating to bullying, especially where a student is not attending school, the Government has sent a clear message to schools that bullying, for whatever reason, is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. We are clear in guidance that if school staff feel that an offence may have been committed they should seek assistance from the police. If an offence had been committed we would expect the police to respond regardless of whether or not the young person was attending school. Therefore we do not think there are gaps in existing laws or processes regarding how bullying behaviour which constitutes a criminal offence should be handled.

In relation to the action of the police in this specific case, Home Office have re-confirmed that police forces are operationally independent of Government and it is their chief officers who determine the resources allocated to particular priorities. This is in line with the Policing and Crime Plans, published by Police and Crime Commissioners, to whom chief officers are accountable. Guidance on the way that suspected offences are investigated is produced by the College of Policing, the professional body for policing.

With best wishes.

Nick Gibb



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 7614 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk

Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

Damian Hinds MP
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith St
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

10 January 2018

Dear Damian,

Response to e-petition 201003: "Make Bullying a Criminal Offence"

The Petitions Committee met on 9 January and considered a recent e-petition entitled "Make Bullying a Criminal Offence", to which your Department has responded. The Committee does not consider that your Department's response meets the guidelines agreed between the Committee and the Government, and has asked me to write to you.

The response falls below the standards we expect in two important ways.

First, the response does not acknowledge the death of the petitioner's son, who took his own life after being bullied. Given the tragic circumstances in which the petitioner's son took his own life, it is very disappointing that the response makes no mention of his death.

I would be grateful if you could draw this letter to the attention of Ministers and officials involved in drafting and approving petition responses, to ensure that responses to petitions on sensitive personal subjects are treated with the appropriate care and compassion.

Second, the response does not address directly the issues raised by the petition. It explains that there are laws already in place to protect people when any form of bullying behaviour constitutes a criminal offence, and says that the Government has no current plans to introduce any additional legislation in relation to criminalising bullying behaviour.

The petitioner, however, raised a specific point about gaps in the current laws and processes relating to bullying, especially where a student is not attending school. The Committee would be grateful for a response that addresses this specific point.



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Please send a revised response which can replace the original on the petitions site. In sending this response, it would be helpful if your officials were to make clear what changes have been made to the original response.

Best wishes,
Helen

Helen Jones MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee