

Letters to the Editor



School bullies

Sir, You point out that councils have spent about £100 million in the past four years fighting parents who seek support for their disabled children and have lost nine out of ten cases ("School Bullies", leading article, Nov 17). But why incur the cost of an education tribunal when the council knows it has a strong likelihood of losing? Councils know they are likely to lose, but insist on a tribunal because parents cannot afford the associated costs. This leaves them with no choice but to leave their child in inadequate education. Awarding costs at tribunals — not at present undertaken — would significantly address this issue. Councils would be more selective when they have a weak case, and parents would have increased capability to enforce their legal rights.

Councils save money by keeping children out of more expensive SEN schools and this compensates for the cost of lost tribunals. But councils have a legal obligation to provide an adequate education for all children, irrespective of cost, so councils are not complying with the law. This is why councils lose nine out of ten tribunals. Awarding costs would place more pupils in education appropriate to their needs, and councils would be held more accountable.

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Sir, As parents of a son with a dual diagnosis of autism and Down's syndrome, we have long battled with our local authority to get the right educational provision. Despite a range of independent medical reports that have all diagnosed the seriousness of his condition, diagnoses that are supposed to inform his EHCP plan, none of these has ever been used to inform the pedagogic needs of our son. We were refused access to our son's personal budget despite the government supposedly setting up a system that allowed parents to have their say. This situation is not unusual. Access to the occupational, speech and language therapies that are outlined in his plan is simply not delivered due to inadequate staffing. Equally, many staff even in SEN schools lack the skills necessary to develop children with a range of disabilities. Quite literally, children are trapped in their own bodies and will never reach their potential until parents are listened to and proper implementation of EHCPs is guaranteed by law.

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