

**P-05-522 Asbestos in Schools –
Correspondence from petitioner to Committee, 10.04.18**

Dear Kathryn

Thank you for your further email.

I can confirm that the Cross Party Group on Asbestos is presently considering the consultation on Welsh Government Guidance on Management of Asbestos in Schools with a view to preparing a response. The consultation such as it consists of 2 documents which largely mirror the Department for Education Guidance. Other than the draft Guidance documents there are no questions seeking discussion of issues and it would appear that the documents have only been distributed to those identified as key stakeholders and are not widely available.

I would be grateful if the Petitions Committee might be reminded of the recent report of the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster on 30th March 2018

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/760/76005.htm>.

I refer in particular to section 6 which seemingly goes beyond Academy Schools in England.

“6. The Department does not have enough information about the extent of asbestos in schools to ensure that the risks are being properly managed.

Asbestos is a significant, and potentially dangerous, problem in many schools. In April 2017, we found that the Department did not have a complete picture of the extent of asbestos in school buildings. The Department’s first property data survey did not assess the extent of asbestos. Only a quarter of schools responded to its second survey, in 2016, which aimed to collect data on this issue. We recommended that the Department should set out a plan by December 2017 for how it would fill gaps in its knowledge about the school estate in areas not covered by the property data survey. The Department’s latest property data survey is currently taking place and will provide more information on the presence and management of asbestos. The Department accepted that information on asbestos in school buildings should be available locally and easily accessible

to parents and local communities. ESFA told us that it expected information on asbestos to be available locally for parents to view, and without recourse to Freedom of Information requests. We were concerned to hear of an example where this had not been the case and local communities could not easily access this information.

Recommendation: The Department should publish the results of its ongoing exercise to collect data on asbestos; and make clear to Local Authorities and academy trusts that information should be made available by the end of June 2018.”

The Committee is clearly intent on ensuring that the Department for Education is fully informed about the extent of asbestos in schools in England. I would suggest that we should expect no less with regard to schools in Wales.

As you are aware the right to know about the presence of asbestos in our schools in Wales is central to the petition before the Committee.

I am heartened both by the concern of the Petitions Committee regarding transparency over the issue of the asbestos in our schools in Wales and also by the statement of the Public Accounts Committee (see above) that “*The Department accepted that information on asbestos in school buildings should be available locally and easily accessible to parents and local communities. ESFA told us that it expected information on asbestos to be available locally for parents to view, and without recourse to Freedom of Information requests.*”. In other words the Department for Education in Westminster now accepts the need for openness over the issue. Recent correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary is indicative of wholly different approach. I respectfully ask that the Petitions Committee continues to press for full disclosure of the data relating to asbestos in our schools in Wales. It may be the Cabinet Secretary ought to be reminded of her statement following the closure of Cwmcarn High School in 2012.

<http://www.welshlibdems.wales/en/article/2012/621814/parents-pupils-and-staff-have-a-right-to-know-about-asbestos-in-their-schools-kirsty-williams>

'Welsh Liberal Democrats

***Parents, pupils and staff have a right to know about asbestos in their schools
– Kirsty Williams***

October 16, 2012 1:17 PM

Kirsty Williams, Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, is calling on the Welsh Government to conduct a national audit of asbestos in schools following the closure of a school in Caerphilly.

Cwmcarn High School, which has more than 900 pupils, shut late last Friday after a structural report identified asbestos. Many school buildings in Wales were built between the 1940s and 1980s, when asbestos was used extensively.

Kirsty Williams, Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, said:

"Asbestos is a hidden killer and I am very concerned that pupils, staff and teachers at our schools could be unknowingly exposed to asbestos. Many of our schools that were built between 1940s and 1980s used asbestos during construction for its fire-retardant and insulating properties and the mere act of sticking a drawing pin into a wall could disturb the fibrous crystals. The prolonged inhalation of these fibres can cause serious illnesses including malignant lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

"I do not want to cause undue alarm, however when a school of 900 pupils has had to close because asbestos was found in airborne particles, I think that people across Wales have a right to know if asbestos is a danger in their local school. Britain imported hundreds of thousands of tons of asbestos in the last century and we do not know the extent of its use in our schools nor how secure it is in school buildings.

"The welfare of the pupils, teachers and staff at our schools is paramount and I want to Welsh Government to conduct an audit of situation right across Wales. The Welsh Government will try to shift the responsibility onto local authorities and schools however they do not have the sufficient resources or skills to take the lead on this. It's time for the Welsh Government to take

responsibility so that our teachers and pupils can have the confidence that they are teaching and learning in safe surroundings."

Once again I am grateful for the continued interest shown in my petition by the Committee.

Diolch o galon

Cenric