# Port Talbot school ordered to apologise to student for discrimination



An Education Tribunal Wales hearing has mandated that St Joseph's Catholic School in Port Talbot issue an apology to a student and his parents, following findings of discrimination against the pupil regarding the school's behaviour policy. The tribunal concluded that the school had failed to provide appropriate support for 15-year-old Kian Mills, who has been diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia.

Kian's parents, Aldon and Julie Mills, exited the school system last June and have since opted for home education due to their concerns for their son’s well-being. They reported that Kian was subjected to excessive detentions, exclusions, and isolations for trivial infractions, leading them to worry significantly about his mental health.

The situation escalated in June 2024 when Julie was notified that Kian would face yet another isolation. At that point, Kian had accumulated over 250 disciplinary actions, a compendium of sanctions that prompted the family to ultimately withdraw him from school. "We took him out of school in June of year nine because they were going to give him isolation again and I thought that enough is enough," Julie Mills said, expressing her concern about the education system's efficacy. She added, “At school, Kian was so unhappy he was getting depressed.”

Initially thriving in primary school, Kian encountered difficulties upon transitioning to secondary education. The strict COVID-19 lockdown measures enforced a rigid classroom environment, which proved particularly challenging for him as an energetic child with undiagnosed ADHD. When he struggled to conform to these expectations and to maintain focus, it led to a cycle of disciplinary actions.

Julie, concerned about her son’s struggles, sought an assessment for ADHD, which she funded personally. Kian received his diagnosis in Year 8; however, despite notifying the school, he continued to receive inadequate support. Not all teachers were aware of Kian's diagnosis, exacerbating his academic challenges during a parents' evening. The school did not comply with the necessary adjustments to its behaviour policy, according to the Mills family. They voiced their frustrations after failing to receive necessary assistance despite their repeated appeals to the school and local education authority.

In June 2023, after further intervention from the then Education Minister Jeremy Miles, Kian was finally granted an Independent Development Plan. Unfortunately, by this time, his relationship with education had already deteriorated significantly, leading to the decision to pursue home education. Julie represented Kian in the tribunal against the school's management, including headteacher Dr John Felton.

The tribunal, which concluded on 9 January 2025, found in Kian's favour, ruling that St Joseph’s had failed to enact reasonable measures to accommodate his needs and had discriminated against him. The tribunal judge, Paul Allen, stated that the school's policy disadvantageously affected Kian compared to non-disabled peers. He remarked that the educational breakdown Kian experienced was “entirely preventable,” yet acknowledged that some members of the senior management should be credited for their willingness to reassess school policies.

As part of its final order, the tribunal specified several remedial actions St Joseph's must undertake. The school is required to issue apologies to both Kian and Mrs Mills, revise its behaviour policies, and enhance training for staff on supporting neurodiverse students and understanding disability discrimination. Reports of the tribunal’s findings must also be included in Kian’s education records. These changes are to be implemented by set deadlines throughout 2025.

Despite the tribunal's ruling and apologies, Julie Mills remains reluctant for Kian to return to St Joseph’s. She expressed concerns about the overall educational system, identifying a troubling trend of inadequate support for children with additional learning needs, citing a lack of resources and communication routes for parents. The Mills family seeks to raise awareness of these issues, with Aldon stating, “There is no clear way to complain or make a query and no obvious route to navigate what happens if a child has ALN.”

Kian has shared that his current home education experience is markedly more positive than his time at St Joseph’s, stating, “It's a lot better not being in school.” He expressed previously trying to voice his struggles but felt unheard. Now pursuing his education at home, Kian is focusing on his interests, including aspirations of becoming a chef.

A representative for Neath Port Talbot Council has declined to comment on the specific case, citing policy regarding individual situations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)