



Chief Executive **Lindsay Freeland**
Chief Executive's Office

Mr Andrew Howlett
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Public Petitions Committee
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Our ref: EDUC/6/LP
Your ref:
If calling ask for: Lynn Paterson
Phone: 01698 454669
Date: 9 October 2013

Dear Mr Howlett

Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE1487 on Religious Observance in schools

I refer to your letter of 6 September 2013 in which you requested this Council's comments in relation to the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of a new petition PE1487 on religious observance in schools and would respond as follows.

Question 1

What are your views on what the petition seeks and the discussions that took place at the meeting on 3 September?

South Lanarkshire Council believes the current legislative position within the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 should be retained.

Religious Observance (RO) is defined as 'spiritual acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community'. (Scottish Government)

Scotland is a diverse nation. RO can, and should, reflect and support diversity while, at the same time, recognising our long standing traditions. RO can, therefore, encourage respect for Christian traditions and different faiths and beliefs of others – or indeed those with no faiths or religious beliefs.

Religious observance can support school communities in developing a deeper understanding of the worth of each individual and how they contribute to their school and wider community. As such, RO supports the development of citizenship awareness – locally, nationally and globally. RO, therefore, supports the development of the 4 capacities which lie at the heart of the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence. In this way, RO forms part of the totality of young people's learning experiences and supports whole school planning around curriculum design. As with some other aspects of the curriculum, planning for RO should also involve parents, ideally through involvement and discussion with Parent Councils. This provides parents the opportunity to contribute to how learning experiences are shaped through RO.

Well planned RO is sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs – from both a faith and non-
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faith point of view. If RO really reflects the school's community, young people will be able to participate without compromising their personal faith and beliefs – if any. RO, therefore, contributes significantly to the development of tolerance and celebration of diversity and should underpin and promote a school's values and ethos. RO and Religious and Moral Education (RME) are mutually complementary.

As with RO, RME programmes should reflect and take account of young people's communities. In addition, however, RME supports the awareness of Scotland being a diverse nation by allowing young people to explore and develop an understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the world's major religions, while they develop their own beliefs and values. In this way, young people are encouraged to understand where they 'fit' into their local and global communities. The dynamic diversity of Scotland provides enriching opportunities for both RO and RME and facilitates the development of responsible attitudes which encompass tolerance and acceptance. Opportunities can be afforded for reflection on religious and non-religious views.

Establishments may find it helpful to refer to RO as 'Time for Reflection', with the reflection process fostering critical thinking and discernment skills.

Question 2

How many pupils do not attend religious observance in schools within your local authority as a result of their parents choosing to opt out?

Currently, 151 pupils do not attend religious observance in schools as a result of their parents choosing to opt out.

Question 3

What provision is made for an alternative activity for pupils who do not attend religious observance in schools within your local authority, and what issues prevent a suitable alternative activity being provided?

Pupils complete school work set by staff. Due to the irregular pattern and timings of RO, the type of work undertaken by pupils may be dependent on staff availability. Planned RO activities can vary from a short input at a school assembly to a longer activity to celebrate Christmas or Easter. The activity can involve a specific year group/stage or the whole school. The type of RO has an impact on the type of work set and availability of staff.

I trust the above information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

Lindsay Freeland
Chief Executive