

## PE1487/EE

Petitioner Email of 12 November 2013

Dear Convener

I am writing to you about our deep concern on the Scottish government's stated position regarding the provision of Religious Observance in Scottish schools, with respect to our petition (PE1487) which will come before you today, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

The respondents to our petition, including the government, have failed to address the issues we raise in our petition and in supporting documentation. We feel these issues must be addressed in order to satisfy the parents who inspired its submission.

We ask that you write to the Scottish Government to clarify the following unaddressed points:

1. Why, if Religious Observance is indeed inclusive and non-confessional as per its stated aims, do the minorities whom the current system says that it seeks to include not actually feel included? *(Please refer to submissions by the Jewish Communities, Pagan Federation and the Humanists.)*
2. If the current law is sufficient, parental rights have been communicated clearly including the right to withdraw and the need to provide information on which to base a decision, is that right still missing from many school handbooks? Why did the YouGov poll find that only 1 in 5 parents are told by the school of the right to withdraw, and 40% never find out at all?
3. How is the Scottish Government ensuring that when a child withdraws from religious observance they are not disadvantaged, when we show clearly that in many cases they are? How does the Scottish Government monitor Religious Observance including opt outs to ensure children are not penalised or disadvantaged?
4. Does the Scottish Government take the view that since opt out numbers are relatively low that this should form the basis of policy? As per the above statistics, and the testimony of parents, we show that many do not know of the right to withdraw or do not exercise it because they fear the consequences, hence the actual numbers are artificially low.
5. What steps have the Scottish Government taken to ensure schools know what a suitable alternative activity is, given that there is abundant material on what

constitutes Religious Observance on Education Scotland's website but not one single entry regarding a suitable and meaningful alternative?

6. How does the Scottish Government balance the rights of the parent and/or the child who may wish to withdraw from Religious Observance in denominational schools? In the latest guidance the Scottish Government state that parents who have sent their child to a denominational school have accepted their ethos, and yet these schools are open to all under the law, and we have testimony from parents saying their children attend for a variety of non-faith reasons.
7. Do children at denominational schools have in law any less rights than those in non-denominational schools?
8. How does the Scottish government reconcile the many discrepancies between their stated position and their view of the current system with the extensive evidence we have submitted?

As you can see, there are a great many questions which have not been answered. Given that at the heart of these questions lie the Human Rights of children, we ask that you ensure this matter is given the serious and measured consideration that all questions of Human Rights and their breach should be accorded.

Best Regards

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**Scottish Secular Society**