

PE1487/S

Interfaith Scotland Letter of 11 October 2013

**Religious Observance in Schools (PE1487)
Response from Interfaith Scotland**

Thank you for your invitation to respond to the petition regarding religious observance in schools. As a membership organisation we are unable to respond on behalf of the whole organisation but we have been asked to make the following response on behalf of some of our members.

Interfaith Scotland is an organisation that celebrates the rich religious and cultural diversity that makes up modern Scotland, and as our members reflect that rich diversity, understandably, there are also diverse responses to the petition and many member faith communities have individually responded (Church of Scotland, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, Scottish Episcopal Church, Catholic Church). Therefore this response is only on behalf of members from the following faith and interfaith groups;

Muslim House
Sikh representative on the Glasgow Gurdwara Council
Baha'i Council for Scotland
Brahma Kumaris
Salvation Army
United Reform Church
Shetland Interfaith Council

There is agreement that **religious observance** (as defined by the Scottish Government) should not be confused with religious education, nor with religious worship and that it is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith or belief.

It is also important that adequate provision is made in schools for the religious practices of diverse faith communities such as, particular diets, religious dress, festivals and fasting.

There is great potential for well thought out, inclusive, religious observance to create opportunities for pupils to reflect upon the rich diversity of values, beliefs and ideas that make up a pluralist society. Religious observance, again if it is done with sensitivity and thought can help to create a sense of inclusion that enriches a school community.

There is general agreement with the statement made by Scottish Ministers in the 2005 guidance that RO '**should** provide opportunities for the school community to reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual and their contribution to the school and wider communities'.

Religious observance is therefore a valued aspect of the school curriculum and as such the member representatives listed above would prefer that the '**opt out**' clause remain in place.

Dr Maureen Sier

Director

Interfaith Scotland [formerly, The Scottish Inter Faith Council]