

PE1487/Z

Karen Vicki Allen Email of 1 November 2013

Dear Petitions Committee,

I am sending this email to express my absolute support for Scottish Secular Society's petition the Scottish Parliament to get provision of Religious Observance changed to Opt In, so that schools would have to inform parents of what Religious Observance provision is taking place, what ideas it contains and who communicates them, and then to ask for permission for their children to attend.

The reason for my support is that I'm having genuine problems in trying to arrange for my children to be opted out of Religious Observance. Please see my email below to Linda Fabiani, MSP, particularly the bullet points explaining some of the problems encountered. I'm particularly concerned that senior school staff (Deputy Heads and Guidance Teachers) are simply not aware of parents' rights to have their children opted out of Religious Observance. In spite of letters posted to the school, emails to follow up and face to face meetings, my daughter was (again) today treated as being disobedient for refusing to attend mass.

I would further like to say that, on the whole, I find my children's school to be excellent in many ways. I therefore suspect the root cause of the problem is that Local Authorities do not have processes and resources in place to deal with an opt-out situation. Therefore, they are effectively "between a rock and a hard place" - they are forced to honour parents' rights while not having the resource to deal with the consequences.

I would also like you to know that I am a Christian. However, at the ages of 15 and 14 years, I believe my children are old enough to make up their own minds regarding Religious Observance and see absolutely no benefit to them in reluctantly attending Religious Observance activities when they could be doing something more constructive with their time.

I would be more than happy to discuss this with face to face with the committee, or supply further details and information.

Yours faithfully,

Karen Vicki Allen

-----Original Message-----

From: Karen Vicki Allen

To: linda.fabiani.msp

Sent: Fri, 1 Nov 2013 18:20

Dear Linda,

I have had some unfortunate experiences recently regarding my right to have my children withdrawn from Religious Observance at school. I live in East Kilbride and my children attend St Andrew's and St Bride's High School. I am aware that the Scottish Secular Society has petitioned the Scottish Parliament to get provision of Religious Observance changed to Opt In, so that schools would have to inform parents of what Religious Observance provision is taking place, what ideas it contains and who communicates them, and then to ask for permission for their children to attend.

I fully support this petition and ask that you support it also.

My reason for supporting it is because of my and my children's bad experiences in trying to get them withdrawn from Religious Observance activities. I have noted some of these experiences below:

- Even after sending individual letters (one per child) to the school instructing them to allow me to exercise my rights, my older daughter has been reprimanded for refusing to attend mass
- Both the Deputy Head of my daughter's year and her Guidance Teacher were unaware of parents' rights to have their children withdrawn from Religious activities, even though it is stated in the school handbook
- Even after following up the letters posted to the school (one was recorded delivery), the Deputy Head and Guidance Teacher still take the stance that my daughter ought to attend mass (today being All Saint's day, she was instructed to go to church for mass, even though the school has received letters and emails indicating that I am exercising my right for my older daughter and son to not take part in Religious Observance
- Today my daughter was left sitting in a corridor outside her Guidance Teacher's office while her classmates were at mass. The school evidently has no process in place to deal with children who have been opted out.

This petition (PE01487) is due its second hearing on the 12th of November, and I request that you support it. This minimal change in the law would allow for the participation of those who do want Religious Observance in schools, for the parents of children to be fully and properly informed on this important area of their education, and for those who cannot in good conscience be involved to not compromise their Human Right to freedom of faith and conscience. It is an excellent compromise between conflicting views.

You can find the petition and its responses here:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/petitions/religiousobservance>

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Karen Vicki Allen