

Remove Religious Observance from Non-Denominational Schools

Petitioner's Statement

Religious observance has nothing to do with education, but everything to do with indoctrination.

It is indoctrination in the same sense that it would be if we allowed, for example, the SNP to enter our schools and tell the children who they're going to vote for when they're 18.

Imagine if the children in our state-funded schools were made to sing songs in praise of the SNP manifesto?

Imagine if they were given pictures of Alex Salmond to colour in?

Imagine if they were having to sit in assembly listening to somebody from the SNP coming in to tell them that the SNP is associated with light and hope and all things positive, and that to be a good person you really ought to be an SNP supporter?

All of this is going on in our schools. All you need to do is replace the political references with religious ones.

The Scottish government, the churches and evangelising organisations such as Scripture Union Scotland and Prayer Spaces in Schools would tell me that if I don't like it, I can always choose to withdraw my child from RO.

But that's like telling a patient with a broken leg that if you don't like having a broken leg, feel free to have broken arm instead.

Because I can only use the "opt-out" option at considerable disadvantage to my child and to myself.

No child wants to be segregated from the rest of their class.

This makes children so uncomfortable that it is often used as an effective method for dealing with misbehaviour. It is the modern day equivalent of physical punishment, and is endorsed as such by the UK government.

So in other words, I can choose between having my child indoctrinated, or having my child punished for my refusal to have him indoctrinated.

As for myself, if I chose to withdraw my child from RO, it would mean that I would

have to declare my position on religion to the school – this is basically the same as forcing me to publically declare my political affiliation.

So, parents are in effect forced to give the Church of Scotland 'shared custody' of their children, in exchange for a state education. This is of course a completely outrageous and intolerable situation.

You won't find any references to indoctrination in the Scottish Government's guidance on RO, because they prefer to use the more "user-friendly" term "spiritual development" instead. I suspect that they, like Mary Poppins, believe that:

"A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, in a most delightful way!"

Well, there is nothing sweet or delightful about this strategy, and I hope you don't swallow it. I hope you will see RO for what it is: a vehicle for religious indoctrination. And finally, I hope you will agree that it should have no place in our schools.

Veronica Wikman

Religious Observance – a Vehicle for Religious Indoctrination in Education

By Veronica Wikman

The religious observance assemblies and additional related activities that are delivered by chaplains and parish ministers in Scotland's non-denominational state schools throughout the year, and in some schools on a weekly basis, are controversial and provoke a lot of anger among many of Scotland's parents who would like to see them banished from their children's education. According to a recent YouGov poll 63% of the respondents in Scotland are in favour of a secular education system, and consequently wish to see these assemblies, which in reality take the form of a 'Sunday School' session and are often reminiscent of a church service, removed from their children's education.

The conscience clause in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, gives parents the right to opt out of religious observance (RO), but this option is rarely used, because it is only possible for parents to remove their children from RO at a considerable disadvantage to the children and to themselves.

Children make great efforts to fit in with their peer-group. This is an important part of a child's normal, social and emotional development. Children who are excluded from their peer-group feel anxious and left out, and become the object of curiosity and derision from other children. Another downside to exclusion is that it is associated with misbehaviour. It should be noted that the UK Government recommends "removal from class or group" as a method for dealing with misbehaving pupils (School discipline and exclusion, www.direct.gov.uk).

In a BBC Scotland report that was broadcast on 30th April, 2012, a father described how his child was made to sit on the bench outside the head teacher's office, usually reserved for misbehaving pupils waiting to be told off by the head teacher, as an alternative "activity" during RO. Evidence suggests that similar forms of humiliating or inappropriate treatment of children who are withdrawn from religious observance may be far from unusual. In many cases children who are withdrawn are not provided with any alternative activity, but are simply given a book to read or left to roam the school corridors.

The fact that all children are automatically enrolled in religious observance and that parents who wish to remove their children from RO have to inform the school about their decision, means that parents are forced to make public their position on religion. This is obviously an outrageous situation, quite comparable to being forced to declare one's political affiliation.

For the above reasons, no child wants to be excluded and few parents choose to have their children excluded even if they hold no religious views and strongly object to their children being involved in religious observance.

Consequently, we have a situation where non-religious parents, or even those of a different religion, can only protect their children from the influence of evangelical chaplains and Church of Scotland ministers by disadvantaging their children and risking damaging their emotional and social development.

Religion is a topic that is very divisive. The fact that parish ministers and faith groups are welcomed into our schools means that the schools are perceived to be endorsing religion. For the non-

denominational schools this is obviously a problem as they exist to serve the entire community, not just the religious. Also, the practicalities of splitting children up between those who take part and those who don't, mean that children are encouraged to view each other as 'us and them'. How is that going to help to create a socially cohesive Scotland?

Religious observance isn't just limited to the minimum eight times a year that the chaplain or parish minister has access to the children in school or in church. In addition to this, children in some primary schools are engaged in RO-related art activities or singing, on a weekly basis. An example of this is the controversial song "Who put the colours in the rainbow?" (published by Scripture Union in 1971) which has a very strong creationist, anti-evolution message, evident in the line "Who taught the honey bee to dance? Who put the tree inside the acorn? It surely can't be chance!"

Young children are intellectually immature and have open, impressionable minds. They are also socially primed to accept as fact whatever an adult in authority tells them. This means that they are particularly vulnerable to all forms of indoctrination, whether political or religious.

Religious observance has nothing to do with education, but everything to do with religious indoctrination. This is exemplified in brutal clarity by the RO assembly resource "Light Dispels Darkness" that seeks to condition children to develop a fear of darkness and an attraction to light. By utilising the concept of opposites (which primary school children have been taught during their nursery education) and making use of various audio-visual stimuli, children are taught to associate positive words (love, peace, compassion, giving, medicine, hope) with belief in God/religion (which is represented by light) and negative words (hate, war, cruelty, poverty, sickness, despair) with atheism/non-religion (which is represented by darkness). The link between religion and light versus the link between non-religion and darkness is never explicitly expressed or spelt out in the resource, but children's natural way of thinking ensures that these associations will be firmly implanted in the child's mind.

This resource was first created by the Church of Scotland in 2007 under the title "Light Dispels Dark" and the almost identical version, mentioned above, was published by Education Scotland in 2010.

It is crystal clear that religious observance is a vehicle for indoctrination, designed to accommodate the interests of the Church of Scotland at the expense of the interests of the children of Scotland. The UN Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) makes clear that children have the right to freedom of thought and that their best interests should always be a primary consideration, yet the current Scottish Government is happy to approve of RO assembly resources that are not only in breach of the CRC legislation but also undermines the flagship goals of the Curriculum for Excellence, in particular with regards to creating "successful learners" and "confident individuals".

The Church of Scotland's historical role as an education provider for the masses is often mentioned by the advocates of religious observance, but, however important that role has been in the past, it ceased to be relevant in 1872 when the State, i.e. the taxpayer, took over the responsibility for education. It hasn't been 1872 for well over a hundred years, so the Church of Scotland's continued presumption that the children of Scotland are theirs to play with is beyond preposterous. It is a notion on a par with a seller insisting on retaining a key to the house he has already sold.

It is essential that publicly funded education in any country that likes to call itself a democracy remains neutral, and hence does not seek to promote or accommodate the interests of religious,

political or commercial organisations. It is therefore as inappropriate to give the Church of Scotland access to children during school hours as it would be to do so for the SNP or the Coca-Cola Company, for example.

Removing RO wouldn't just be a welcome move for atheists, secularists and humanists, but also for liberal Christians who are uncomfortable with the heavy-handed way in which the Church of Scotland is imposing its faith on the non-religious and on those of a different religion.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 gives local councils the power to remove religious observance from its non-denominational schools by bringing this matter to a vote. A petition has been launched to gain at least 500 signatures from electors in Edinburgh in order to get the City Council to consider conducting a poll of electors to vote on bringing about an end to religious observance in Edinburgh Council's non-denominational schools.

How many times have you written your name so far this year? Most of us scribble down our names hastily without thinking, because it often serves a mundane purpose of little importance.

But how often does your signature have the potential to trigger an important change of perhaps even historical significance? How often do you get the chance to stand up for one of the most precious principles of democracy – freedom of thought?

Please add your name to the petition to “Remove religious observance from non-denominational schools” on the City of Edinburgh Council website:

(www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/219097/remove_religious_observance_from_non-denominational_schools). And the next time you walk past the statue of David Hume on the Royal Mile - you can do so with your head held high.

Edinburgh Secular Society

Challenging religious privilege

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Submission of Supplemental Evidence in Support of Ms Veronica Wikman's Petition concerning Religious Observance in Schools

Edinburgh Secular Society (ESS) has actively supported the motion that is before the Petitions Committee in the name of Ms Veronica Wikman.

ESS is strongly in favour of freedom of all forms of expression, including religious expression, and is strongly in favour of school pupils being educated about different religions and about humanism, atheism and secularism.

ESS is, however, against using public-funded institutions to propagate religious beliefs or to practise religious rituals.

We respectfully remind members of the key issue raised by this petition before City of Edinburgh Council (CEC). It is not whether religious observance (RO) in 'non-denominational' city schools within its responsibility should be required, but rather whether CEC should conduct a ballot to allow their electors in the city to determine whether they wish religious observance in city schools be discontinued.

ESS suggests that all members of CEC make a final decision on the proposal, rather than transferring the responsibility to a committee or sub-committee of the council.

Public confidence in the Council would be gravely undermined if the Education, Children and Families Committee (ECFC) of the Council alone make a final decision on this petition. This committee's membership includes three unelected external members nominated by religious denominations, all of whom are Christian, and must be regarded therefore as having a conflict of interest in any decision. Whatever public confidence there is currently in the ECFC of the city council will probably have been undermined further by the revelation in the papers of this year's Church of Scotland Assembly that: "three church representatives hold the balance of power on 19 local authority committees."¹

The existence of substantial public support for the petition, evident in the large number of city electors signing it, suggests that there is sufficient public disquiet with the practice of religious observance in city schools, and that electors should be given the opportunity to vote on whether it should be discontinued.

¹http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/13790/3_CHURCH_and_SOCETY_2013.pdf (paragraph 11.4.3)

Additionally, the existence of a counter petition to retain religious observance in city non-denominational schools, which has considerable support, suggests that public opinion on the matter is divided and that it is best resolved by a ballot of electors.

We ask that you consider the supplementary evidence attached to this letter, and that you reach a decision to support the petition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary McLelland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Gary McLelland

22 May 2013

Chair Edinburgh Secular Society

Supplemental Evidence: Petition concerning Religious Observance in Schools

Statistical Evidence

In the 2001 census, 28 per cent of Scots declared that they had no religion. In 2011, according to the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey², 53 per cent of Scots now have no religious faith. In Edinburgh, 37 per cent of the population reported that they had no religion (2001 census) – a figure in contrast to 28 per cent nationally (City Council 2003³, Scottish Government 2005⁴). Currently, then, the City of Edinburgh is likely to have a majority of its population with no religious affiliation. Note, too, that Church of Scotland ministers, who conduct a large portion of the religious observance (RO) in city schools, represent a denomination that, according to the 2011 survey data, has the adherence of only 22 per cent of the Scottish population.

That such a large proportion (probably a majority) of the Edinburgh population has no religion, and that there is such diversity of forms of religious faith, suggest that it is impossible to find forms of religious observance in schools that would be acceptable to all. It indicates city schools should discontinue the practice of religious observance.

Any form of religious observance in city schools can be considered as a form of indoctrination, which privileges one or two forms of religious expression over many others. Time engaged in religious observance by pupils would be better spent learning about the full range of religious and belief diversity, rather than focusing on the practice of one among numerous denominations or sets of beliefs.

Religious Organisations in Schools

It is the policy of City of Edinburgh Council that: 1) head teachers are encouraged to appoint a chaplain or chaplaincy; and, 2) there will be a minimum of six religious observance opportunities per year for each pupil. The council's own school inspection reports (available on its web site) illustrate the very close relationships built up by chaplains with their schools to which they are attached. These are non-denominational schools where one might reasonably query why chaplains are or need to be appointed.

² <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/scottish-social-attitudes-and-other-news/>

³ City of Edinburgh Council 2003 report dated 8 May 2003 (CEC/01/03-04/CSItem5e)

⁴ Scottish Government 2005 'Analysis of Religion in the 2001 census'

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/02/20757/53568>

Further, there is clear evidence that religious organisations, using the access to schools RO affords them, extend their participation and influence into many other aspects of school life.

In some cases, chaplains appear to have taken on the role of classroom assistants or supply teachers. For example, with regard to Flora Stevenson Primary School in Stockbridge/Comely Bank:

“The school chaplain provides a very positive contribution to many aspects of school life by his involvement in school assemblies, religious and moral education (RME), support work in class and supporting and sharing in the residential experiences provided by the school.”⁵

In another example, an extract from the report on Morningside Primary states:

“There are regular opportunities for religious observance, including assemblies and celebrations in local churches. Local chaplains provide helpful support to the school including working with children.”⁶

Indeed, Scripture Union Scotland and the Church of Scotland have a joint programme entitled ‘Serve Your Local School’ (SYLS)⁷ which specifically encourages Christians to offer their services to both Primary and Secondary Schools. The Scripture Union claims over 2000 volunteers⁸ actively participate in the programme, with Christians offering to assist schools in various ways, including, on residential trips, sports days and as classroom assistants.

However, evidence would strongly suggest that the true motivation behind religious organisations participation in RO and SYLS-type programmes is to proselytise. The Scripture Union’s web site, on its home page, states:

“Help us plant seeds of faith in children and young people living near you! Do you long for more children and young people in your local area to know about God, and how much he loves them?”⁹

In a recent interview, Wayne Dixon, a Scripture Union development worker, stated:

⁵ Sub-committee on educational standards: Central and south 17 June 2003

⁶ www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/meetings/id/3781/south_morningside_primary_school_and_nursery_class-school_inspection

⁷ <http://www.syls.org.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/volunteers-and-training/about-volunteering/>

⁹ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/8.id>

“However, generally speaking our children / young people aren’t coming to our churches but 99% of them are in school. We do well to be there and to encourage others to be there serving in a variety of ways. My hope – prayer – role is that by being in school and being myself I can share something of Jesus that will connect with some of this 96% and my feedback – gut reaction is that this is welcomed. I’m just an ordinary guy who is a Christian and I want to dispel some of the misconceptions young people have about Jesus and Christianity so at least they will give Jesus a thought. I thank God that schools have been welcoming and allowed me and others in to do just this.”¹⁰

Moreover, the Scripture Union openly promotes a programme within schools called ‘Hanging About Ministry – HAM’¹¹. Worryingly, this programme encourages Christian volunteers, who often gain access to school under an RO remit, to address and interact with pupils, unsupervised, in areas of the school such as common rooms, dining halls, sports days and class registration. Wayne Dixon, a strong proponent of HAM, states:

“I turn up, sign in and have a ‘plan’. Usually I start in the common room before lunch, as there are usually students around and we chat about, well, anything and everything! Then the lunch bell goes and I’m out of the common room and starting my routine. I may start with lunch, where I sit with some students and chat and eat. Then I go on a walk about. There are usually some specific groups of young people whom I try to meet up with and catch up with, and this is just great. Then there is the unusual – the unplanned, but always very interesting. You should always expect the unexpected!”

Edinburgh Parents

The evidence we have presented in this paper clearly illustrates that proselytising and indoctrination are core to religious organisations aims when gaining access to schools. It is no surprise then, that there is considerable disquiet amongst many Edinburgh parents regarding RO and the influence it allows certain religious groups over their children.

Since the launch of this petition, to allow a ballot on the discontinuance of Religious Observance from Edinburgh schools, ESS has received communications from a cross-section of the Edinburgh-based public. Examples are show below:

¹⁰ <http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/thinking/entry/interview-with-wayne-dixon/>

¹¹ www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/.../Schools_hanging_around.pdf

1) Submitted 24/02/13:¹²

“My son is in Primary 2 at a non-denominational school, he is my first child so this is really the first dealings I have had with school life after leaving my school days behind me many years ago. Anyway, I have found out that the school chooses to have the Primary 7 leaving ceremony in the local parish church; I have approached the Parent Council about this and have met with some real boundaries and a lot of resistance. I choose to live life without religion I don’t see why a school, especially non-denominational are having a leaving ceremony in a Christian place of worship as that is not at all inclusive for all students especially taking into account the school’s multicultural and diverse make-up of the current pupils attending.

I understand the whole ‘opt out’ option but I don’t see why my son should have to miss out on a ‘right of passage’ and important end to his primary school years especially when the school is non-denominational”.

2) Submitted 22/02/13:¹³

“Heard Neil Barbour (ESS Media Officer) on the radio this morning and couldn’t agree more. I am aware that the Parent Council at Ratho Primary have raised the issue with the local minister coming into the school on a regular basis”.

3) Submitted 22/02/13:¹⁴

“Your Evening News article is circulating in the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community and a number of us have signed your petition today”

Religious Observance ‘Opt –out’ Option for Parents

There is provision within the current legislation for parents to withdraw a child from Religious Observance. However, this places the parent in an intolerable position of having to decide whether to remove their child from its peer group, or to subject the child to religious influences contrary to their wishes.

¹² Name and address held by ESS

¹³ Name and address held by ESS

¹⁴ Name and address held by ESS

This position was the one Veronica Wikman found herself in as a mother of a primary school child in Edinburgh. Indeed, this was the motivation behind her submission of the petition to the Council calling for the removal of RO from Edinburgh schools.

Ms Wikman states:

“Parents are put in the impossible situation of having to choose between having their children indoctrinated, or, having their children punished for their refusal to have them indoctrinated. Why should I, as a parent, be forced to give the churches “shared custody” of my child in exchange for a state education? This is of course an intolerable situation. Religious observance is a vehicle for religious indoctrination, no matter how many layers of euphemistic language are painted over it to disguise that fact. It is clearly indefensible and should have no place in state education in a democracy.”¹⁵

Another Edinburgh parent wrote this articulate and passionate account, published in the Edinburgh Evening News, of her experiences and feelings towards the opt-out option:

“Would you punish your child for not believing in God?”

We have a system in our schools at present that provides all children, regardless of religion or lack of religion, with regular contact with a Church of Scotland minister, and what can often amount to a sermon several times a year. In many schools children may also be invited to pray.

You may be perfectly happy with this; you may know about it and object to it; but mostly parents just do not know because it is not something most schools make clear. Schools are allowed to not make this clear because the regulations controlling it are not very clear.

What happens if you are not happy with this system? Well, luckily for you, you can remove your child from these Religious Observance events, and have your child wait around somewhere else, maybe by themselves, but certainly separated from their friends and the school community. But hold on, isn't that what schools use as a consequence of a child's continuous or unacceptable bad behaviour?

School discipline and exclusion:¹⁶

¹⁵ Veronica Wikman submitted to ESS 20/02/13

¹⁶ UK Government, www.direct.gov.uk

'Schools have a legal right to impose reasonable sanctions if a pupil misbehaves. Sanctions a school might use include:

- a reprimand*
- a letter to parents or carers*
- removal from a class or group*

So, there we are. We are not going to do this to our children, or not till they are old enough to choose for themselves and realise this is not a punishment. We are not going to do this because we care about our children's feelings. Schools and Education Authorities also claim to care about these kinds of feelings, but not enough to object to such a system, which clearly does not put children first and really does not offer parents any sensible way out. It manipulates a parent's natural concern to ensure there is no challenge to a system which is clearly not inclusive or equal.

What kind of a parent would you have to be to remove your child? Unless you are of a different faith, it seems a bit fanatical to remove your child. You don't want to make a huge affair of it but you have to. You have to openly and obviously reject religion, using your child as proof of your fervour but in fact all you want to do is bring up your child according to your own beliefs. If you could show your preference to not have your child automatically enrolled in a more discreet, less seemingly confrontational way, would you? You don't have to be any kind of fanatic to see this is not a good system. You are not trying to pass judgement on anyone's religion; you have decided it is not part of what you want for your family. You are not trying to put into a child's head that Christianity and the Minister are so fearsome they are to be avoided in such a way, just that they shouldn't be seeking your children out at school with their message. The model of walking out when you don't agree with what someone says is not really to be encouraged at school, or ever in life, so why is it being offered as a viable option to parents?

Schools shouldn't be given the role of endorsing religions, only teaching about them. Who is allowing this system to continue through every kind of school review when it seems to contravene so many clauses concerning children's and parental rights?"¹⁷

Both these Edinburgh mothers accounts, and the previous evidence regarding the pervasive influence religious organisations can have in many areas of school life, raise some fundamental questions:

¹⁷ Name and address held by ESS – submitted 2011

- 1) *How can a parent withdraw their child from RO, when under that heading, religion is allowed to influence and impact on so many aspects of school life?*
- 2) *What of the rights of the child to an education free from religion influence?*

Legal

In relation to the legal position of a right to an education free from religion, human rights group Liberty has the under-noted comments regarding education:

“While education is recognised as a right of the child, international and domestic human rights law have tended to focus disproportionate on the rights of parents to control the content of their children’s education. For example, Article 2, Protocol 1 of the Convention states that everyone has a right to education and then goes on to say that the State has an obligation to respect the rights of parents to ensure that education and teaching of their children is in conformity with the parents’ religious and philosophical convictions. The emphasis on the rights of parents as consumers in education law and policy is problematic because it dilutes the child’s right to an education and it discourages acceptance of children’s right to participate. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has expressed concerns about the inadequacy of recent education legislation, in light of Article 12 UNCRC.”¹⁸

There is some concern that the current RO rules are in conflict with the specific obligation to *“respect the rights of parents to ensure that education and teaching of their children is in conformity with the parents’ religious and philosophical convictions”*

Conclusions

ESS reiterates its support for the teaching of Religious & Moral Education to all school pupils.

We believe there is compelling evidence that makes the continued practice of enforced Religious Observance in Edinburgh schools unsustainable. The statistical data clearly indicates a decline in religious belief and this trend is likely to continue. The likelihood is that more and more Edinburgh parents will challenge enforced observance as they disengage from religion.

The pervasive nature of some religious Christian organisations within general schools life, often under a remit of delivering RO, effectively nullifies the opt-out option for parents. In addition, we have concerns that RO over-rides the rights of a child to an education free from religion.

¹⁸ <http://www.yourrights.org.uk/yourrights/the-rights-of-children-and-young-people/education/index.html>

Accordingly, ESS supports the petition of Ms Wikman. ESS endorses the opportunity it affords city electors to decide by ballot whether the very questionable practice of religious observance in state-funded, non-denominational city schools should be continued.

**** **END** ****

challenging religious privilege

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Provision of Religious Observance in Schools

A Review of Current Guidance

By Alistair McBay
National Secular Society
May 2013

This document is a Review of the “Curriculum For Excellence – Provision Of Religious Observance In Schools” Letter dated 22 February 2011, issued by the Learning Directorate (Curriculum Division) of the Scottish Government. It can be found here:

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/roletter_tcm4-650445.pdf

It replaced Circular 1/2005 – “Provisions for Religious Observance in Scottish Schools”.

In broad terms, the Letter repeats the content of Circular 1/2005 as to Religious Observance (RO) but there are some important additions.

The wording of the Letter appears in italic by paragraph, and comments and observations appear beneath. A set of conclusions that may be drawn appears at the end.

Paragraphs 1,2,3

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 continues to impose a statutory duty on local authorities to provide religious observance in Scottish schools. This letter replaces guidance previously contained within Circular 1/2005 and reflects the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence across all of Scotland’s schools.

This letter clarifies the current position regarding the provision of religious observance in Scottish schools and sets out action for local authorities in planning the provision of religious observance. The Circular has been updated to reflect the adoption of Curriculum for Excellence and applies to all primary and secondary schools, including special schools. It is intended to assist local authorities and schools in the delivery of religious observance and sets out the continuing statutory requirements regarding its provision.

3. The policy on religious and moral education in non-denominational schools and religious education in Roman Catholic schools is covered in a separate letter which will be issued in conjunction with this.

These introductory paragraphs are self explanatory, but importantly reaffirm the statutory requirement and Scottish Government commitment to compulsory RO in Scotland’s schools. It also formally recognises that there will be a difference between Catholic schools and non-denominational schools.

Paragraph 4

Scotland is a society with a longstanding Christian tradition. However, Scotland has for many generations also been home to many who have other faith and belief traditions, never more so than at present. This trend is likely to continue as Scotland remains a country where people from other communities are welcomed and we can expect Scotland to become increasingly diverse in the range of faith and belief traditions represented. Religious observance needs to be developed in a way which reflects and understands this diversity. It should be sensitive to our traditions and origins and should seek to reflect these but it must equally be sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith or non-faith perspective.

This in effect repeats more or less word for word Paragraph 3 in Circular 1/2005, with some differences. Principally, it drops the reference in Circular 1/2005 to Census statistics. This is interesting because the Census statistics for England & Wales published in 2012 showed the continuing and marked decline in those identifying themselves as religious, and Christian in particular. Perhaps the Scottish Government was concerned as to what the anticipated Census results for Scotland would reveal on religious adherence and did not want to be challenged on its continuing policy on forced RO in the light of what may be to come.

The called for sensitivity to wider spiritual and needs and beliefs (faith or non-faith) is not being borne out in practice. A Freedom of Information request was made by an Edinburgh parent and asked the question: "In order to present viewpoints on religion held by atheists and agnostics, do you also provide religious observance assemblies delivered by for example the Humanist Society? If yes, how often do these assemblies take place?" The answer provided by City of Edinburgh Council was: "We do not explicitly invite atheists and agnostics or any associations of a similar outlook to contribute to religious observance and have never been approached to do so."

Paragraph 5

The recommendations of the Religious Observance Review Group outlined sensitive and tactful solutions which will allow schools to provide religious observance which is an inclusive, valuable and meaningful experience for all. Scottish Government Ministers consider religious observance to be an important educational experience for children and young people at all stages of primary and secondary school. In accepting the Group's recommendations, Ministers believe that learning and teaching can build on Scotland's strong Christian traditions without compromising them, while also promoting the understanding of, and respect for other faiths and beliefs.

This repeats Paragraph 5 in Circular 1/2005. The recommendations of the Religious Observance Review Group are analysed elsewhere (not within this paper). It is argued in this Paragraph that RO is 'inclusive' but in practice as our research has shown (and which the tone and content of the Letter generally conveys) it is overly and openly biased to being 'inclusive' from a Protestant Christian perspective. In practice it simply ignores RO in the context of other faith positions. There is no definition offered as to the value of forcing religious observance on children, or on how and why this will be 'meaningful', a word which suggests that the desired outcome would be for children to express belief in God. We also know that the use of the word 'inclusive' is disingenuous. The Catholic Church, for example, claims that 'its' schools are inclusive, yet it is being 'exclusive' when it discriminates with the full force of the law against pupils, parents and teachers of no faith or the wrong faith, but in favour of Catholic pupils, teachers and parents. That Scottish Government Ministers see RO as 'an important educational experience' betrays the continuing and inherent bias contained in the make-up of the Religious Observance Review Group in 2004, and possibly to their own Christian-based upbringings. It is also no doubt the result of extensive Christian lobbying through the Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education. The expressed wish that RO 'can build on Scotland's strong Christian traditions' effectively means that RO will be biased toward the Christian faith - the Protestant version in non-denominational schools, the Catholic version in Catholic schools. Our research confirms this, while other belief or non-faith based systems are merely to be a matter for 'understanding' and 'tolerance' and are not subject to religious observance. This is in effect forcing confessional Protestant Christianity on all pupils in non-denominational schools.

Paragraph 6

However, Scottish Government Ministers also recognise that whilst the Education (Scotland) Act uses the term religious observance, and as a consequence both Scottish Government and its partners (LTS and HMIE for example) use the same terminology, schools may feel a different name for the events that meet their religious observance requirements will be more appropriate to their context and culture. This is to be encouraged but needs careful thought and if possible some external reference point. For example, in a non-denominational school, the use of the title Time for Reflection might be appropriate because it is a clear description of the activity. This term is also used in other contexts, such as the Scottish Parliament.

This is an interesting new departure from Circular 1/2005. An optimistic view is that it appears to recognise that schools now have room to accommodate non-religious perspectives and non-belief ethical positions. It may reflect the fact that there are some Scottish Government Ministers who are not religious and perhaps therefore are not entirely comfortable with or so committed to their Government's position on this matter. It may recognise that a confessional Protestant Christian RO is no longer entirely appropriate for the increasing diversity of belief and no-belief backgrounds of Scottish schoolchildren, and so schools may use alternative approaches. In practice, however, we suspect that it is mere

window-dressing, and while schools may now conduct what they call a Time for Reflection, the content will still be predominantly if not exclusively religion-based, as per the Scottish Government's openly stated aims. What is really happening when Time for Reflection still includes prayers, hymns and bible readings? The 'Time for Reflection' descriptor is just a New Age term for worship, in the same way that indoctrination has become the much less pejorative 'spiritual development'.

Paragraph 7

Scottish Government Ministers also accept the definition and aims of religious observance proposed by the Review Group as being: "community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school's community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community".

This is a verbatim repeat of Paragraph 6 in Circular 1/2005. It is apparent from this that 'spiritual development' is seen as essential for everyone in the school ('all members of the school community'), including teachers. In effect, this is a democratic Government cloaking the indoctrination of children into belief in the Christian God by employing the euphemism 'spiritual development'. Parents might object to indoctrination but spiritual development is much less provocative and unlikely to invoke the same reaction – who can possibly object to the development of their children? What is being delivered here is the means to a belief in a Christian God, forced on all pupils, and set as a mandatory objective of the education system, in conjunction with (or, in view of ever-emptying pews, in place of) the roles of parents and religious institutions. The secular position is that it is not the function of Government to promote religious belief, either per se or through the education system.

The 'shared values' to be expressed and celebrated appear to have been arranged in a hierarchical order with Christian values placed first and privileged in their promotion to a captive audience. We have to contrast this Paragraph 7 with the statement in Paragraph 4 that RO needs to be "*equally be sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith or non-faith perspective*". In this Paragraph 7, RO is to be imposed on all members of the school community who are going to express and celebrate 'shared values' where RO is only from a Christian perspective. What happens when the values of different members of the school community are different or in conflict? We know only too well from examining the different faiths that they embody different and conflicting values, further proven by the multiplicity of denominations that exist within them. Children, parents and teachers who are not religious may also uphold different and even conflicting values compared to religious ones. For example, in the latter case, such values may be the right of women to have control over their own bodies, or the equal rights of LGBT people. Such views may not be shared by religious people. Whose 'shared values' are therefore to be celebrated in the context of Christian-based mandatory RO, led as it often is by Reverends?

Paragraph 8

Religious observance has an important part to play in the development of the learner's four capacities: a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor. It should also 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.

This repeats Paragraph 7 in Circular 1/2005 and remains platitudinous in the extreme. There is still no explanation offered as to how confessional RO of one kind helps children develop in the ways described, or why it should have 'an important part to play' in their development, or how its effect is to be measured in such terms. It is not clear either how 'the dignity and worth of each individual' is found in Christian and Islamic views on the role of women in society, their views on LGBT people or their attitudes to issues such as access to contraception, abortion services and same-sex marriage. If an indication of the 'deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual' is to be derived from the public announcements of Catholic, Protestant, Islamic and other religious leaders on homosexuality and same-sex marriage, then forced RO in schools is a very dangerous concept indeed.

We are currently examining some of the learning materials and resources provided for RO and an initial analysis reveals that some of these may in fact undermine the development of these four capacities in individuals.

Paragraph 9

Scottish Government Ministers welcome the tradition that, in Roman Catholic denominational schools, Catholic Liturgy will largely shape the nature and frequency of religious observance activities in the classroom and in the wider school community. So, at times, children and young people will be invited to participate in, and sometimes to lead, prayer and reflection in classrooms and at assemblies. At other times, to honour particular occasions or feasts, chaplains will lead school communities in the celebration of Mass and other forms of liturgical celebration.

This is a new insertion. It sees the Scottish Government enthusing about Catholic RO and laying the ground to suggest it might be a generic model for the non-denominational sector to copy, in terms of frequency, extending of RO beyond the usual formal school assembly setting, and so on. Such an approach is also evidence of the Scottish Government's stated desire to 'celebrate' Catholic education and effectively downplay its role in promoting sectarianism.

Paragraph 10

In recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage, non-denominational schools are also encouraged to draw upon the rich resources of this tradition when planning religious observance. However, many school communities contain pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment, and this must be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. 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.

This is a repeat of Paragraph 8 in Circular 1/2005 and clearly plays into the hands of organisations like Scripture Union Scotland, the Kirk and other Christian groups on the liberal to conservative spectrum as their green light that they can be fully involved in planning and leading RO. Our research on Edinburgh's non-denominational sector in 2013 reveals the extent of that involvement, and suggests that non-denominational schools have in effect become confessional Protestant Christian schools. At least the guidance clearly directs them towards that goal but of course does not specifically say so in so few words. The final sentence of this Paragraph is muddled. There is only one form of religious observance on offer, the Christian variety, so it is impossible to see how those of other faiths or none can 'participate with integrity... without compromise to their personal faith stances'. Indeed, it assumes that those 'with no faith commitment' still need to be exposed to 'spiritual development' because the Government thinks it will be good for them.

Paragraph 11

At present in non-denominational schools, assemblies are the most common vehicle for delivering religious observance. There should be a clear distinction between assemblies devised for the purpose of religious observance and assemblies for other purposes such as celebrating success. The precise form of religious observance will be determined by each school's policy within the local authority's framework, but these might include opportunities for class, year, stage or whole school observance as well as involvement by pupils and others, including school chaplains and other faith leaders, in planning and presentation.

This repeats Paragraph 9 in Circular 1/2005 and remains a disturbing Paragraph which in effect mandates RO not just in the traditional school assembly context, which is apparently only 'the most common' approach, but beyond it, for example on a class by class basis or, as we see later, as a component of any other school activity where religion can be introduced, for example celebrating saints, important dates in the Christian calendar such as Lent, Easter, etc. As our research shows, this

statement opens the door for Christian groups to engage pupils in RO outwith assemblies and redefine any activity as an opportunity for RO - school trips, classroom activity, sports or whatever. Any activity or event is now being seen by evangelical groups as an opportunity for a confessional form of RO.

Paragraph 12

Religious observance needs to take place sufficiently frequently to have an impact on the spiritual development of the school community. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance.

A repeat of Paragraph 11 in Circular 1/2005. Not content with prescribing the quantity of RO that is to be undertaken, quality is to be the subject of focus as well. That implies that proper resourcing has to be undertaken. The definition of 'sufficiently frequently' is wide open to interpretation well beyond the scope of formal assembly settings, and there are no upper limits set. There is no definition offered as to what a 'quality' RO event will look like, or how success in achieving 'quality' will be measured, and by whom – the chaplains? The parents? The pupils? Perhaps the ultimate measure is a consequential deepening of every child's 'spiritual development' and thus belief in God. The Church of Scotland has addressed the quality issue by creating an annual work plan for ensuring maximum leverage from RO, and by 'Religious Observance: Design and Practice', a peer-led, experience-based course about the delivery of RO, accredited at masters module level and delivered in partnership with the University of Glasgow, Church of Scotland and Scripture Union Scotland. There is every intention here that this level of commitment from the religious authorities is intended to ensure schoolchildren become followers of Christ.

Paragraph 13

There is a need to balance the frequency which would make a positive impact on children and young people with the need to ensure that the experiences are valuable and inclusive. This will require careful planning by schools. Every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year, in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community, and preferably with greater frequency. We recognise that many primary schools value weekly religious observance as part of their regular assembly programme and will wish to continue with this. The school community should be involved in making decisions about frequency.

This repeats Paragraph 12 in Circular 1/2005, but eliminates the opening reference there to the Review Group document from 2004. This leaves the definitions of frequency, value and inclusivity wide open to subjective and individual interpretation. We can assume the requirement for 'careful planning' is more concerned with maximising quantity and quality, and commanding appropriate resource, rather than indentifying what is too much. That the occasions 'will require careful planning' also opens up an avenue for schools to outsource this responsibility to willing Christian groups intent on fulfilling their 'outreach' and 'mission'. The specification as to 'at least six times per school year' is then reinforced by the reference to 'preferably with greater frequency'. Again, there is no upper limit suggested, and no limit to the amount of RO the Scottish Government wishes to see forced on children. The requirement that 'the school community' should be involved in frequency decisions is disingenuous – it is clear from our research that parents, a vital component of the school community, are all too often disenfranchised in this process in many schools. Teachers may also be disenfranchised in schools with authoritarian headmasters but, anxious to keep their jobs, are not inclined to object or protest.

We also question the sentence "*The school community should be involved in making decisions about frequency.*" This raises issues as to the composition of Parent/Teacher Associations and Parent Councils, which are presumably included in the "school community," as to who gets co-opted on to these committees. How is a balance struck between representation of religious and non-religious, so as to ensure there is no disproportionate influence over the school by religious believers?

Paragraph 14

There is a statutory provision for parents to withdraw children from participation in religious observance. This right should always be made known to parents and their wishes respected. Parents should be provided with sufficient information on which to base a decision.

This is a repeat of Paragraph 13 in Circular 1/2005. Our research shows that not all schools do make the statutory provision known to parents, and that parents are not being provided 'with sufficient information' as to the full extent of RO being practised in order to make a decision, even when they ask for it. In effect it is made difficult for parents to withdraw their children and many are reluctant to do so due to the social exclusion element. As we see in other Paragraphs, once RO takes place in a host of other settings beyond assemblies in accordance with the Scottish Government's wishes, the practicalities of withdrawing children from every one render this statutory provision unworkable for schools, which is no doubt the Government's underlying aim. It appears from the following Paragraph 15 that the information to be provided to parents sufficient for them to make a decision is to be heavily biased towards dissuading them from invoking the opt-out.

Paragraph 15

Scottish Government Ministers consider that religious observance complements religious education and is an important contribution to pupils' development. It should also have a role in promoting the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. Schools are therefore encouraged to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds.

A repeat of Paragraph 14 in Circular 1/2005 which remains an appalling and disgraceful Paragraph which sees Government endorsing religious observance as an essential element to religious education, and positively equating 'ethos' with the requirement for all pupils to participate in confessional religious experiences. Of course the only RO experience children get is of a Christian variety – Protestant in non-denominational schools, Catholic in Catholic schools. No explanation is offered as to why such an experience is necessary to create 'a sense of community'. One is inclined to ask why creating a sense of community in a school is apparently not possible to achieve without religion as a component. The so-called encouragement to schools 'to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds' is akin to Orwellian double-speak, intended to play a guilt-trip on parents that in withdrawing their children from religious observance they will be undermining the very ethos of the school. What parent would want to be singled out as being responsible for that? In addition, it is no longer simply a case of a child being withdrawn from a formal RO assembly setting. With RO to be practised in a wider range of school activities beyond the 'most common vehicle' of the school assembly, it becomes very difficult for pupils to be withdrawn on every RO occasion. No doubt this is also a by-product of the language used in the Guidance that the Scottish Government is pleased to see.

Paragraph 16

Where a child is withdrawn from religious observance, schools should make suitable arrangements for the child to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity. In no circumstances should a child be disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from religious observance.

This is a repeat of Paragraph 15 in Circular 1/2005. There is still no definition offered as to 'worthwhile alternative activity', nor how 'disadvantage' is to be construed. The process of withdrawal is one of social exclusion. Parents are naturally concerned that by making a fuss about this that their child or children will be disadvantaged in some way and so may reluctantly go along with the RO process. As explained above, the practicalities of withdrawing a child from every RO activity render the exercise of the withdrawal option extremely difficult.

Paragraph 17

Where a parent chooses a denominational school for their child's education, they choose to opt in to the school's ethos and practice which is imbued with religious faith and religious observance. In denominational schools, it is therefore more difficult to extricate a pupil from all experiences which are influenced by the school's faith character.

This is a new addition, and clearly designed as a warning to the less religiously motivated parents whose children attend denominational schools that they will only be causing problems by trying to withdraw their children from every activity defined as RO, and we know that these are many. It clearly implies that the price to be paid for their children attending a denominational school is immersion in 'spiritual development' and in effect extends this to a non-denominational setting. In any case, as our research reveals, the non-denomination sector has itself become "imbued with religious faith and religious observance'.

Paragraph 18

Scottish Government Ministers value the important and varied contributions that chaplains and other faith group leaders make to the life of the school, for example in their involvement in religious observance, acts of worship, religious and moral education and a broader pastoral role. Headteachers are encouraged to engage in full discussion with chaplains and other faith group leaders in the planning and the implementation of religious observance. In supporting religious observance, their own religious beliefs should be respected and they should not be asked, or expected, to compromise them.

This is a repeat of Paragraph 16 in Circular 1/2005 and remains another ill-considered Paragraph. It invites the law of unintended consequences (or, given the approval of religious belief by the Scottish Government, perhaps that should be intended consequences) by giving carte blanche for chaplains to do pretty much as they please, and use the leverage given by the expression 'headteachers are encouraged to engage in full discussion with chaplains' to secure compliance with their Christian confessional approach. Note that chaplains are not to be asked to compromise their beliefs in any way while clearly it is acceptable for the beliefs of parents and pupils to be compromised in the interests of school 'ethos' and in pursuit of the Scottish Government's clear agenda for its schools to 'do religion'.

Paragraphs 19 and 20

The Religious Observance Review Group considered the relationship between organised acts of worship and religious observance. They concluded with the following statement: "Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community's faith in the focus of worship may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the Review Group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, non-religious groups, chaplains and other faith leaders."

Ministers endorse this approach as complementary to schools' policy on religious observance and would ask schools to consider this statement when planning for religious observance.

These two paragraphs repeat the single Paragraph 17 in Circular 1/2005. Clearly there is a wide definition in operation as to 'other religious leaders' and 'groups', and seems to conclude that it is by default a good thing to have religious leaders from external organisations actively involved in non-denominational schools. There is a token nod towards 'non-religious' groups. It will be a brave headteacher who ignores the Government's cajoling on this issue. The reference to 'informal curriculum' reinforced what was said in earlier Paragraphs for confessional RO, yet again, to be practised outwith the formal school assembly context, and further to be led (as in 'offered') by religious leaders external to

the school. Note too that RO is here openly called 'worship' (the veil is withdrawn) but at least avoids the word 'veneration' used in guidance south of the border.

We also query the sentence that says "Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community's faith in the focus of worship may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school." In what circumstances would a non-denominational school be continuous with a faith community? It can be assumed that this covers schools in places in the Highlands and Islands, notably Lewis, which is the stronghold of the Free Church which no doubt believes taxpayer-funded schools there are 'its schools'.

Paragraph 21

Members of the school community, including pupils, parents and representatives of faith groups and communities, may wish to have opportunities for organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum of the school. Ministers would encourage headteachers to consider these requests positively and make suitable arrangements if appropriate support arrangements can be provided.

This repeats Paragraph 18 of Circular 1/2005. It sees yet more pressure applied to schools to accommodate requests of 'representatives of faith groups' in the 'informal curriculum' for yet more forced RO, now openly called 'acts of worship,' and especially where such groups provide their own personnel to execute the tasks. This of course presents an opportunity for hard-pressed teaching staff to pass the burden of RO to outside sources, and so opens the school door to all sorts of groups with a proselytisation agenda. Schools where teachers' own faith positions are sympathetic are no doubt also those where the principles espoused in this Letter are most enthusiastically executed.

Paragraph 22

Consideration should be given to providing appropriate facilities in schools for acts of religious observance and worship. Locations need to be considered in the light of the size and diversity of participating groups. Locations for religious observance and worship should be considered in the planning and design of new and refurbished school buildings, to provide facilities which meet school and community needs.

This repeats Paragraph 19 of Circular 1/2005 and seems to write RO requirements into the design of school buildings, and not just whole school assembly spaces. Given the call to consider RO opportunities beyond the traditional all-school assembly format, this Paragraph can also be used to justify dedicated classroom sized areas, for example as prayer rooms. It also appears to open the door for schools to be used by religious groups outside the school, which becomes part of a more widely utilised community facility. Note that the wording says "Consideration should be given..." Again, it will be a brave headteacher or local authority which does not do so, with external religious groups ready to invoke the Circular at every opportunity. It should be remembered that the current situation for RO in Scotland arose from a report by HM school inspectorate that expressed concern over secondary schools not allocating sufficient time to RO.

Paragraph 23

Glasgow University, Scripture Union Scotland and the Church of Scotland have created a learning opportunity to assist school staff, chaplains and other faith group leaders in the delivery of religious observance.

www.gla.ac.uk/departments/religiouseducation

This is a new Paragraph and endorses the role of an external Christian group SU Scotland in delivering the Scottish Government's objectives for RO. It begs the question as to why, for example, the Humanist

Society of Scotland, or Glasgow Central Mosque, have not been similarly endorsed. We know the HSS has a range of teaching materials for a humanist, non-theistic perspective, but of course we already know the answer – the function of RO as far as the Scottish Government is concerned in non-denominational schools is to promote confessional Protestant Christian worship, cloaked in euphemisms such as ‘spiritual development’.

Paragraph 24

Learning and Teaching Scotland website offers guidance and exemplar materials to support schools in developing high quality activities for education about faith and belief, and for religious observance. www.LTScotland.org.uk/religiousobservance

This is another new Paragraph that directs teachers to resources to fulfil the objective of delivering confessional Protestant Christian RO in non-denominational schools.

Paragraph 25

The Scottish Catholic Education Service offers guidance and exemplar materials to support denominational schools on aspects of religious observance and School Chaplaincy. www.sces.uk.com

Another new Paragraph, perhaps a triumph for an ecumenism so lacking in other circles, that celebrates the work of SCES and Catholic schools in indoctrination-focussed RO, and refers to their materials as ‘exemplar’. Anyone who has read The Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland (<http://www.sces.org.uk/catholic-schools-charter.html>) is left in no doubt that the purpose of Catholic schools is to turn out practising Catholics. In holding up SCES as an ‘exemplar’ model, it is impossible not to interpret the Scottish Government’s aim for the non-denominational sector as turning out practising Christians of the Protestant variation.

Paragraph 26

Local authorities and schools are invited to:

- *work with the school community to plan the content, frequency and location of religious observance, in line with this Circular and the Review Group report;*
- *review their policies on religious observance, and develop practice in line with this Circular, the Review Group report and Curriculum for Excellence; and*
- *introduce necessary changes into planning processes as soon as possible.*

This repeats the concluding Paragraph 21 of Circular 1/2005. It contains more of the soft language found throughout the document, with words like ‘invited’, ‘encouraged’ and so on. However headteachers, like the rest of us, are keen to keep their jobs. They will not want an adverse school report from the school inspectorate in the areas of RO and RME, where they will be measured against this and other relevant guidance from the Scottish Government. We think it will be a brave headteacher or local authority which ignores this ‘invitation.’

Guidance ends

OUR CONCLUSIONS

There are four inherent assumptions apparent in this Letter and in the Scottish Government's view on religion generally, and religion in schools specifically.

The first is that the Scottish Government sees having a religious faith as a good thing, and intends that all children will have one, especially a Christian one.

The second is that schools in Scotland are the prime medium through which it wishes to enforce this policy, not least in the face of the steady stream of statistics on the collapse of religious belief in Scotland.

Third, the direct involvement of faith groups and religious leaders outwith the school system is by default a good thing, to be welcomed and encouraged.

Fourth, whatever messages are put across in, or activities organised for RO, they are also by default deemed to be a part of that good thing, and the more of them there are, so much the better. In this last respect, the desire is to make withdrawal of children from RO as difficult as possible by ensuring there are as many activities as possible classified as RO.

The drafting of this latest Letter carries on the work established by Circular 1/2005 and remains a gift to organised faith groups, particularly Christian ones, and effectively has indoctrination by another name – spiritual development - imposed on the school estate by the Scottish Government. That indoctrination is, in the non-denominational context, a Protestant Christian one.

This Letter in effect enforces religious observance in many forms and at many opportunities in the school day and programme on Scotland's school children, because the Government thinks it will be good for them. There is no measure that sets a boundary as to what is acceptable or unacceptable, or that makes a judgment as to whether the RO programme achieves its aims. Indeed, there is no stated objective other than 'spiritual development', a new-age euphemism for the more pejorative 'indoctrination', in the context of which enforced RO makes for every child to become "a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor". The Scottish Government evidently thinks this is an unattainable objective without religious indoctrination in the Christian faith - Catholic in that school sector, Protestant in the non-denominational one.

It is also worth noting more generally that the Scottish Government not only likes to present itself as a staunch supporter of faith, but also as a 'Champion of the Enlightenment'. In an address to the Homecoming Scotland 2009, the First Minister Alex Salmond said that the Enlightenment was one of Scotland's contributions to the world. While Scotland may indeed have Christian faith traditions, it is unarguably the Enlightenment that has shaped Scotland the most in these last 400 or so years. The Enlightenment is the retreat from faith traditions and dogma that has marked Scotland's development to this point in the 21st century, and it has made this progress more in spite of the intrusion of belief in gods as because of it. Yet there is no mention made of the principles of the Enlightenment in this Letter, nor is it mentioned at all in the new Curriculum for Excellence. One such important development of the Enlightenment was freedom from religion and belief as well as freedom of it. The forced RO mandated here by the Scottish Government, Champion of the Enlightenment, seems to indicate a retreat from the Enlightenment in this respect.

Scotland's Christian history is also one of conflict, exclusion, discrimination and prejudice – all of which we strongly suspect will either be left out of the process of RO/RME, or whitewashed over. Religion, and not just Christianity, is being presented in schools as a good thing, with its dubious history rewritten to edit out the inconvenient truths. And Scotland's schoolchildren are being forced into worshipping a Christian God.