

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY

EVIDENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS TARGETING & ACCESSING SCOTLAND'S NON-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

September 2013

Methodology

Edinburgh Secular Society (ESS) primarily obtained the evidence contained within this submission from the internet. Direction as to topics of research was influenced, in part, by comments received from parents of school children, from around Scotland, who contacted ESS in relation to issues of religion within non-denomination schools. The research was not aimed at Local Authorities, but rather, at specific religious groups, e.g. the Scripture Union (SU), their activities and the individual schools they were targeting and had been given access to. Research was by conducted, principally, by three ESS Board members over a six month period.

Some evidence researched by the Scottish representative of the National Secular Society (NSS) is incorporated into this submission, and the ESS would like to formally acknowledge his contribution.

Background

Following Veronica Wikman's, an Edinburgh parent and ESS member, experiences of her son being exposed to indoctrinating Religious Observance (RO) at school she raised a petition, in February 2013, with City of Edinburgh Council (CEC), to have it removed from schools. The 1980 Education (Scotland) Act allows for Local Authorities to conduct a poll of its electorate for the removal of RO.

The petition was heard by CEC Petition Committee in June 2013 and was supported by ESS and NSS: both organisations give oral evidence at the Committee hearing. In addition, ESS submitted detailed written evidence in support of the Petition. The Petition when launched in February 2013 generated considerable media coverage throughout Scotland, and indeed internationally. As a consequence, a number of parents, and teachers, contacted ESS with their accounts of negative religious influence in schools. It was from their individual accounts and the initial research, in relation to producing a written submission in support of Veronica Wikman's Petition, that it became clear religious organisations and, in particular, evangelical Christian groups were targeting and accessing non-denominational schools in Scotland.

Introduction

In this article Edinburgh Secular Society highlight the scale and manner in which Christian religious groups, particularly evangelical and conservative ones, are targeting Scotland's non-denominational schools. These groups, we argue, see the non-denominational sector as their very own 'recruitment fair', helped in many cases by sympathetic headteachers and teachers, and by guidance from the Scottish Government, particularly in relation to religious observance (RO), which is an enabling factor in championing their access to schools. This is also achieved through the appointment of school chaplains, whom, we contend, have taken on roles and duties well beyond their remit.

Outreach Work

Church attendance has been and continues to be in rapid decline in Scotland, as numerous items of research continually demonstrate.¹ It is a source of concern for most churches that their congregations are becoming older, with most being of an advanced age, and with very few young children attending church and/or Sunday School.² The strategic response of the churches both to falling congregations and their ageing demographic profile has been not to wait for people to come to church, but to take the church out to the people in what they call 'outreach' programmes. This outreach activity, such as the joint Scripture Union (SU) and Church of Scotland programme entitled '*Serve Your Local School*' (SYLS),³ is being very specifically targeted at pupils within the school setting, and is very effective in targeting what would otherwise be unreachable children of parents who do not go to church or are not themselves religious. The Scripture Union claims over 2000 volunteers⁴ actively participate in the SYLS programme, with Christians offering to assist schools in various ways, including, on residential trips, sports days and as classroom assistants. In addition, the SU operates an Associate Worker Scheme,⁵ which is a partnership between Scripture Union Scotland and groups of churches in different areas of Scotland to employ full-time youth workers who will work in the schools and with the churches. Youth workers often get involved in taking RO assemblies, Religious & Moral Education (RME) classes and running SU clubs within their nominated schools.

¹ <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/scottish-social-attitudes-and-other-news/>

² http://www.edinburghpresbytery.org.uk/content.php?page_id=76

³ <http://www.syls.org.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/volunteers-and-training/about-volunteering/>

⁵ <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/education-and-schools/associate-worker-scheme/>

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

*"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?"*⁶

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

*"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."*⁷

Moreover, the Scripture Union openly promotes a programme within schools called 'Hanging About Ministry – HAM'⁸ Worryingly, this programme encourages Christian volunteers, who often gain access to school under an RO remit as 'Youth Workers', 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!"

There is considerable evidence of Christian youth workers working in schools across Scotland who appear to have unrestricted access to pupils and are engaging in HAM type proselytising. In Larbert High School the full-time youth worker has been given an office within the school and is part of the 10 strong Chaplaincy Team. Worryingly, he states that:

⁶ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/8.id>

⁷ <http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/thinking/entry/interview-with-wayne-dixon/>

⁸ http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Schools_hanging_around.pdf

“Since taking on the new office it has enabled us to make contact and build relations with students of the school who would not normally seek us out. We have a small group of about 15 students who now come in every day at the start of school and during break time and lunch. Amazing opportunity to sow seeds!”⁹

In South Edinburgh two Christian youth workers, associated with the Kirkgate Trust, and involved as Chaplains at Gracemount High and other local schools state:

“It's a huge privilege to be engaging so deeply with such a massive number of children and young people across all local schools and churches. Together the local chaplaincy team are seeing a renewed interest in God, faith and the Bible and teens are pouring into our youth events and from there into church”

and further:

“Most of our time is spent in Gracemount High School as chaplains. As part of this we spend time taking RE classes, running weekly lunch time clubs and also just hanging out with the young people while they eat their lunch.” He goes on to say *“Together, as a team, South East Edinburgh is slowly becoming more like the kingdom of God.”¹⁰*

Out Door Educational/Adventure Centres

Not content with targeting and accessing schools directly, the SU, and other Christian organisations, have set-up and run outdoor adventure centres offering schools ‘educational’ and residential trips for pupils of all ages. The Abernethy Trust runs four centres in Scotland; it is affiliated to the Evangelical Alliance and Christian Camping International (CCI). The Trust asks that all applicants for vacancies have sympathy for the Christian faith and state that:

“Our primary purpose is to share the Christian faith with our guests.”¹¹

⁹ <http://www.larberteastchurch.com/www/attachments/article/10/LCYT%20February%202013%20News.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.kirkgatetrust.org/schools.html>

¹¹ <http://www.abernethy.org.uk/jobopportunities>

Many Local Authorities, including City of Edinburgh Council, list the Trust's centres on their website as an 'Adventurous Activity Provider', there is no mention of it being a Christian based centre. Indeed, it is very difficult to glean from the individual centre websites, such as, Nethybridge,¹² that they are religious and engage in a nightly Christian programme. Many schools arrange residential trips to the centres, although it is far from clear if parents and pupils are made aware of the evangelical nature of the courses. For example, Dean Park Primary in Edinburgh states in its school handbook, under section 6 Enhancing Learning, that:

*"A real highlight of our school life occurs in P6 when the pupils have an annual trip to the Abernethy Nethybridge Adventure Centre. The Centre is situated within the Cairngorms National Park with fantastic outdoor and indoor activities. The children are away for four nights in May, taking part in lots of teambuilding and character building activities."*¹³

The Scripture Union Scotland runs two similar outdoor adventure centres, both used by schools: Lendrick Muir and Alltnacriche.¹⁴ In a video, entitled 'What opportunities are there to bring Christianity into Scottish Schools'¹⁵ a senior SU worker talks about how a maths teacher, and SU member, at Bishopsbriggs Academy, organised a 'Maths Day' at Lendrick Muir centre for all S1 pupils at the school. He states that the purpose of the trip was to let the pupils see:

*"That Scripture Union can be involved with maths and **also in a Christian sort of way get alongside the kids**"*

There are numerous other examples of Christian Headteachers and teachers using their position to foster a school relationship with Christian outdoor centres. Monifieth High School, under the direction of its Headteacher, recently retired Richard Coton, uses a centre called Teen Ranch to which all S1 pupils are sent for an 'Induction day'. The induction day, delivered under the remit of the schools RO and Personal Search policy, which extends to 8pm, is listed as good practice on the Christian evangelical Care Scotland website and states:

¹² <http://www.abernethy.org.uk/nethybridge/>

¹³ http://www.deanparkpta.org.uk/PDFs/Dean_Park_Handbook.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/centres.aspx>

¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBrVMGQMkq0> (3mins 45sec in)

“A short, highly interactive presentation on Christianity by the centre staff towards the end of the day. Monifieth High School’s Headteacher writes to the parents of all P7 pupils inviting participation in the Day. Pupils are encouraged to participate in further residential weekends organised directly with the Centre.”¹⁶

Prayer Spaces in Schools

Further evidence of the influence proselytising Christian groups, and of individual Christian Headteachers and teachers, are having in Scottish schools is evident by the increase in activity of the organisation Prayer Spaces in Schools. Prayer Spaces in Schools (PSIS) as an organisation claims to do the following:

“Prayer Spaces in Schools enable children and young people to explore faith and spirituality from a broadly Christian perspective in a safe, creative and interactive way. A range of flexible resources can be adapted to work for participants aged 5 to 18 bringing an experiential dimension to a variety of subject areas and to pastoral aspects of school life.”

It is clear enough from the name of the organisation that its purpose is to get the Christian faith into schools by this means. It is the initiative of an organisation called 24/7 Prayer International, a registered charity which has links to the highly controversial Alpha Course programme which has its critics as well as its supporters.¹⁷ Of most concern is that a video at the 24/7 Prayer International web site¹⁸ proclaims that healings have taken place in prayer spaces. An extract from the transcript of the video at the link we provide below shows the presenter stating:

“We have seen organic healings take place in prayer spaces. We have seen an 8-year old girl cured of eczema, we’ve seen a guy get cured of a stomach condition, we’ve seen someone else get cured of Crohn’s disease.”

Crohn’s Disease is a chronic inflammatory disorder, in which the body’s immune system attacks the gastrointestinal tract and has traditionally been described as an auto-immune disease, but recent investigators have described it as an immune deficiency state.

Both how prayer spaces within schools are physically constructed and how pupils are told to interact with the associated ‘education’ materials raises real concerns. Evidence, for example, from Gracemount High School in Edinburgh points to blatant indoctrination. Here,

¹⁶ <http://www.care.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/S1-Induction-MonifiethHS.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/alpha.html>

¹⁸ <http://uk.24-7prayer.com/stories/kingdom-come-500-prayer-rooms-so-far/> (40 seconds in)

according to the school Newsletter¹⁹ pupils ended up in a gazebo type construction in a classroom and were confronted with a 1-1 interview situation with a member of the Chaplaincy team:

“Classroom turned into Prayer Space for one week. The classroom included: “The Chill Zone, which was a gazebo furnished with beanbags and cushions, and where you could ask one of the Chaplaincy Team any question you liked”.

Other ‘Zones’ within the Prayer Space included:

“The Cube; where you could write up any question you would like to ask God.”

“Letters from God; where you were asked to think of something God might want to say to You”

Further evidence of the fact that PSIS are using the access afforded to them to proselytise is on their website. Here feedback from pupils and teachers is listed and the website boasts of children experiencing God and converting to Christianity. For example, a teacher, and member of Prayer Spaces in Schools, from Gracemount High School wrote:

“For the week, an English classroom was transformed with fairy lights, drapes, beanbags and colourful displays, into a peaceful, beautiful, safe space. One boy asked if the team had tried to make the room look like heaven, as that’s what he thought it seemed like!”²⁰

In other examples from the website,²¹ pupils from Calderglen High School state:

“I now believe in God”

“I would now consider praying”

Prayer Space in Schools are holding a conference in Edinburgh, November 2013,²² where Richard Coton, retired Headteacher Monifieth High School, is a guest speaker and will talk about expanding PSIS throughout Scotland and the ‘Christian Values Education Project’

¹⁹ <http://www.gracemounthighschool.co.uk/resources/School-Newsletters/NewsletterMarch2013.pdf>

²⁰ <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/stories/item/did-you-try-to-make-this-room-look-like-heaven...-because-thats-what-its-li>

²¹ <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/stories/item/hm-inspectors-praise-the-follow-up-of-a-prayer-space-in-scottish-school>

²² <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/news/item/edinburgh-day-conference-2013-introducing-richard-coton-christian-values-ed>

which he is now involved with. The conference will also talk about: theology and values of prayer spaces, permanent prayer spaces and chaplaincy.

Chaplaincy

One route into non-denominational schools that is being fully exploited by evangelical Christian groups is through the school chaplaincy. While generally the policy on chaplains is made clear by local authorities, we believe that the role is being abused in two ways: one, chaplains give access to school children to all manner of evangelical and proselytising groups; and two, chaplains are routinely exceeding the mandate they have in terms of their own role.

In terms of school Chaplains most people, we think, perceive the role to be fulfilled by a single minister who conducts a statutory minimum of RO assemblies. Indeed, for example, City of Edinburgh Council's policy reflects this by stating that 1) Headteachers are encouraged to appoint a Chaplain or Chaplaincy; and 2) that there will be a minimum of six religious observance opportunities per year for each pupil. However, the reality is completely different. In terms of numbers Chaplaincy teams can, astonishingly, consist of up to ten members, as is the case at Larbert High School.²³ Indeed, across Scotland Chaplaincy teams regularly have six, seven or eight members at both Primary and Secondary schools. Enlarged Chaplaincy teams often contain members who are Christian youth workers associated with the school, they normally run SU, or similar type evangelical clubs within the school (see Kirkgate Trust Youth Workers above), and as such give, we argue, a degree of authenticity to their religious clubs as recognised figures of authority within the school setting.

In addition, there is evidence that larger Chaplaincy teams tend to have members who hold more fundamentalist views, such as creationism, faith healing and Pentecostalism which includes speaking in tongues, yet they have direct access to school children in terms of giving 'pastoral advice' and delivering RME classes including discussions on health care issues. For example, Calderglen High School has a Chaplain who is recognised as one of Europe's leading advocates of creationism and yet is allowed to address RME classes on a range of issues. He also uses the school website to advertise his external evangelical children's club²⁴ called JAM (Jesus and Me). Other members of Calderglen Chaplaincy team also use the school website to advertise their church/youth external clubs.

²³http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/education/school_information/secondary_establishments/larbert/larbert_hs_handbook.pdf

²⁴http://www.calderglen.s-lanark.sch.uk/Calderglenchaplaincy/Jam%20club_1.htm

ESS contends that there has been a deliberate policy, over the last 4/5 years, to expand the role of the Chaplain beyond the recognised RO/RME remit to a far more pervasive, indeed claustrophobic, involvement into all aspects of school life. We believe, there is compelling evidence to support our argument. In particular, we highlight the recently published Church of Scotland document entitled *'The Role of the School Chaplain - Education Representatives Handbook: A guide to good practice for Church of Scotland education representatives on local authority education committees'*²⁵ which outlines the Church's policy for this expansion. The booklet details, for the unelected, but with full voting rights, Religious Representatives who sit on all 32 Scottish Local Authority Education Committees, what the expectation is of them in terms of dictating Local Authority policy on school Chaplaincy. Key points from the documents include:

"Chaplains do not necessarily have to be clergy"

"Meaningful involvement could include taking part in community – wide projects, assisting in some extended curriculum activity, accompanying pupils on an excursion, sharing a meal from time to time with staff and pupils and participating in Parent Council activities."

"While regular contact is recommended sensitivity is demanded. The chaplain should not make a habit of calling at inconvenient times. Less formal visits to share an occasional meal or encourage a sporting activity may provide useful opportunities for a good relationship to develop."

This expansion of the Chaplaincy role being promoted by the Church of Scotland, and of other initiatives, already highlighted, such as *Serve Your Local School* has the potential to see non-denominational schools effectively turned into state protestant faith schools. Indeed, there are examples of schools, both Primary and Secondary, which have already been targeted by Christian groups and are now listed as 'best practice' on the SU website. Examples include Larbert High School²⁶ and lists the following areas in which Christians, both volunteers and official Chaplains, now have direct access to children during normal day-to-day school life:

- *'Drop in' at the youth worker's office to support vulnerable young people*
- *Working with P7's as part of their transition to secondary school*

²⁵http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/13296/302_C_and_S_Reps_Handbook_Leaflet7.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.syls.org.uk/stories/larbert-youth-trust.html>

- *Helping out the school breakfast club and football club*
- *SU groups*
- *Church members supporting the school by volunteering to drive minibuses or **accompany young people on trips***
- *SU activity weekends away*
- ***Regularly building relationships with different groups of young people in the lunch hall***
- *The school now also serves the local church. Their school choir sings for the church once a year and the P7s put on a coffee morning for the community in the church*
- *Chaplaincy team of 10 members*

Example of a Primary school in Blantyre²⁷ with 'enhanced Chaplaincy' is also cited as best practice, listed below are some of the areas of increased role:

- *Team chaplaincy. Each year group now has a dedicated chaplain who goes through the school years with them.*
- *Chaplaincy to the secondary, two Primaries and a special needs school. (Heads talk to each other!)*
- *"Cosy cafe" club in school on Thursdays, and in Church every second Sunday. It has become integrated, with young people attending both*
- *Easter Code and Bubblegum 'n' Fluff (Easter and Christmas presentations) held for P6 /P7 classes.*
- *Chaplain is present on school residential events*
- *One to one counselling is available through the chaplaincy to the young people*

²⁷ <http://www.syls.org.uk/stories/blantyre-baptist-church.html>

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

The ESS contends that the CfE is being deliberately manipulated, by Christians, to blur the lines between RO, RME and formal curriculum subjects to allow the religious to inject their faith into all areas of learning.

Evidence to support this claim is contained within the recently published Church of Scotland document entitled *‘Curriculum for Excellence: Education Representatives Handbook A guide to good practice for Church of Scotland education representatives on local authority education committees’*²⁸. This booklet, written by Richard Coton, retired Headteacher of Monifieth High School, opens with the heading ‘Opportunity Knocks’ and goes on to detail how the CfE is primarily about two things: ‘Doing School Together’ and ‘Making sense of Learning’. Under these two headings, it makes some telling statements, especially as the booklet is aimed at Religious Representatives on Local Authority Education Committees, about how the Church seek to influence the direction of education in Scotland. In relation to ‘Doing School Together’ the booklet states;

*“Doing School Together means giving pupils loads of responsibility, both in the classroom and in helping run the school. **That, by the way, can be a great opportunity for Christian pupils to have an influence.** It also means working in partnership with the community – which gives superb opportunities for local churches and Christian organisations to work in partnership with the school and serve it.”*

Under the heading ‘Making Sense of Learning’ it states:

*“The case studies are linked to the Draft Outcomes and haven’t been updated yet, but they all work just as well with the final Experiences and Outcomes, and **they help you legitimately introduce your faith into a wide range of contexts, both primary and secondary.**”*

The booklet further states:

“As schools look at more dynamic ways of delivering the curriculum, there are excellent opportunities for Chaplains to introduce faith-based resources like:

²⁸http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/13295/302_C_and_S_Reps_Handbook_Leaflet6.pdf

- *Scripture Union's Outdoor Centres which deliver 'Classroom Outdoors' experiences for Curriculum for excellence*
- *Youth for Christ's superb curricular material, all customised for Curriculum for Excellence."*

Evidence is already available of the religious attempting to push their faith into the CfE, for example by arguing that Prayer Spaces in Schools meets the criteria, in terms of outcomes, to be included in the formal CfE.

Summary

ESS believes there is compelling evidence that evangelical and proselytising Christian organisations are targeting and accessing non-denominational schools in Scotland. Moreover, we contend this is a well organised and deliberate policy orchestrated, in the main by the Church of Scotland in partnership with the Scripture Union. There is clear evidence Christian's groups are stretching and exploiting the Scottish Governments guidance on RO, in relation to the definition of 'community acts'. Similarly, they are attempting to blur the lines of informal and formal CfE in order to inject religion into all aspects of the curriculum.

It was surely never the intention to allow unfettered access to non-denominational schools of such a range of evangelising groups, as outlined in this article, and on such a large scale. The result of such evangelical activities when allowed to be implemented unchecked, as in the case of Larbert High School, creates a pervasive and restrictive culture of religion. We argue that their true aim is to proselytise, and it's no surprise that again and again the emphasis of such groups and individuals was to access children in unsupervised areas of the school, such as dining halls and on residential trips.

Questions

The evidence presented raises some fundamental questions, not least how can a parent exercise their right to freedom from religion for their child when religion is so pervasive within normal school life.

It would appear that no Local Authority controls, audits or checks what religious groups have access to schools. No monitoring of input is undertaken as far as we can ascertain.

However, we are not suggesting any religious or non-religious group should necessarily be prevented from presenting arguments to school children regarding the existence (or non-existence) of a god or gods, nor from presenting their particular belief (or lack of it). Rather,

this is because local authorities are passively permitting a situation whereby children are effectively being indoctrinated in one particular belief system, such that their freedom of belief is being severely comprised. These are non-denominational schools, and parents are entitled to construe that terminology as meaning that they are free from indoctrination (unlike Catholic, Jewish or Islamic schools) and pupils are taught about religion but not taught what they must believe, or have the tenets of any one religious faith presented to them at every opportunity.

Additional Information

1) Speaking in Tongues

Michael Rollo is Pastor of Larbert Pentecostal Church (LPC). He is one of **three Pentecostals** on the 10 strong Chaplaincy Team at Larbert High School. He's also the Chaplain at Carronshore Primary School.²⁹

His son John Rollo is Youth Pastor at LPC and their website states:

"He has a passion to reach the young people in the community. John's ministry regularly takes him into various schools in the area".³⁰

LPC state on their website under 'our beliefs' that:

*"We believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit as an endowment of the believer with power for service, the essential, biblical evidence of **which is the speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.**"³¹*

They also state, under the Church History section, that:

*"Church services encourage congregational participation and the **Gifts of the Spirit are regularly manifested.**"³²*

Worryingly, Michael Rollo is also one of the three religious educational representatives on Falkirk Council Educational Committee.

²⁹ <http://www.aoglarbert.org/pastoral%20team.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.aoglarbert.org/pastoral%20team.htm>

³¹ <http://www.aoglarbert.org/our%20beliefs.html>

³² <http://www.aoglarbert.org/church%20history.html>

LPC now hold their Sunday church services, due to increased numbers they claim, in Larbert High School.

Teacher's emails:

This is the content of very telling, and indeed worrying, emails received by ESS from a teacher based at Larbert High School:

1st email:

"You may be interested to know that Larbert High School not only has a Chaplaincy team and a permanent office for a representative from a local church (I believe a very strong Pentecostal one) but is currently asking teachers for recommendations for students who could win the "loving god and your neighbour" (or some such title, I forgot the exact wording) award at school prize giving this year. It is school a where even students and staff who attend church are rather alarmed at the amount of church involvement in the school. Particularly from the local evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Of course as I am a teacher for Falkirk Council then you did not hear this from me as I am banned by my contract from contacting anyone about the goings on in a school. However, as an atheist I find it more and more uncomfortable in a multi-cultural and supposedly non-denominational school to have so much religion from only one view, that of protestant Christianity, shoved on the students."

2nd email:

"We have also had the Chaplaincy team forced on us for both the Holocaust Remembrance and Armistice assemblies. We have argued with our management team but have lost the argument every time .We have tried to explain that it is possible to remember the Holocaust and those who lost their lives fighting in wars without a prayer and some vague Biblical reference. The kids hate it too.

The end of service is also foisted on us and the Chaplaincy team get to have that in their own churches. We have no Imam or Rabbi on the team either. I believe we may not even have a representative of the Roman Catholic. It may be that they were invited but turned it down. I could be wrong.

Colleagues of mine who are religious are in agreement with me that there is too much church involvement in our school."

2) Additional evidence and documents to support the ESS argument: ‘Christian outreach work has the potential to see non-denominational schools effectively turned into state protestant faith schools’

- An overarching document, entitled ‘A Christian Vision for Education in Scottish Schools’ was produced by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Acts) who represent all the main Christian denominations in Scotland. It could be argued that this document, published in 2008, is effectively a church manifesto for education in Scotland. The document outlines the churches desire to increase the influence of local churches and clergy within non-denominational schools, indeed, it set outs, as an example, Roman Catholic schools and how the local parish in ‘active partnership with parents’ are an essential component in the religious formation of young people:

“Many school communities have long-established links with local churches, evident in the effective contribution of local religious leaders to the provision of religious observance and worship in schools. We see the strengthening of these links being vital to the healthy development of school education.”

“In Roman Catholic denominational schools, which see themselves as ‘communities of faith and learning’, such partnership with the local parish, with the active participation of parents and families, is an essential component in the religious, spiritual and moral formation of young people. This partnership is evident at times of preparation for the Sacraments and in the pastoral and liturgical support offered by local clergy and school chaplains.”³³

- Contained within the papers of this year’s (2013) Church of Scotland Assembly it states that:

“three church representatives hold the balance of power on 19 local authority education committees”³⁴

The Church is clearly aware then of the potential power these unelected religious representatives have to influence education policy at local authority level.

³³ <http://www.acts-scotland.co.uk/downloads/publications/2009/ChristianVisionBooklet.pdf> (page7)

³⁴ http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/13790/3_CHURCH_and_SOCIETY_2013.pdf (paragraph 11.4.3)

- The Church of Scotland has produced a number of guidance booklets for its religious representatives who sit on local authority education committees. These booklets are highlighted and outlined earlier in this submission on pages 10 & 12.
- Care for Scotland (Christian Action Research and Education) is a Christian organisation that has considerable standing and seeks to influence public policy over a number of areas.

“CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) is a well-established mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives.”³⁵

CARE has a major policy called ‘Keeping Faith in Schools’. A video outlining their objectives on their website states:

“The aim is to exert Christian influence in schools as only 6% of children are in churches – we need to be in schools’.³⁶

3) Parents Remarks

a) Fiona Smit, Edinburgh parent and member of Edinburgh Secular Society states:

“My son has just started P3 at a non-denominational school in North Edinburgh. After reading about Veronika Wikman’s petition in a news report, I decided to investigate what his school does when it comes to RO.

“I found out that the school chooses to have the P7 leaving ceremony in the local parish church, with the Minister involved, and also that the school has regular visits from this Minister and also from the Scripture Union. These visits all take place without any prior notification to parents. I personally experienced someone from the Scripture Union tell the children at assembly “if you want to get through life the best way would be to read the Bible”!

“I have since approached the Parent Council and also the Head Teacher about this and have been met with some real boundaries and a lot of resistance. I choose to live life without religion and, while I am happy for my son to learn about ALL religions, I don’t see

³⁵ <http://www.care.org.uk/about/who-we-are#sthash.9V0k7Th9.dpuf>

³⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Op8_ySiLxBM&feature=player_embedded

why a school, especially a non-denominational one, chooses to have a school ceremony in a Christian place of worship, and have regular visits from representatives of that faith. This is certainly not at all inclusive for all students and doesn't take the school's multi-cultural and diverse spread of current pupils into account.

"I have since opted out my son for all RO and religious teaching it as it became clear that they are mainly focusing on Christianity rather than ALL religions. In doing this, I was made to feel like a nuisance and trouble maker, and told by the Head Teacher that the school weren't willing to make an Opt Out procedure just for my son.

However, I don't see why my son should be excluded from class time and the P7 Leavers' ceremony which is a 'right of passage' and important end to his primary school years."

b) Jane Francis Parent and ESS member:

"My oldest son started primary school 4 years ago, and as far as I know since then there has only ever been a representative from one local Protestant Christian church invited to lead the school in religious observance. This minister also makes regular visits to the state nursery which feeds into our primary school. I don't think either the school or nursery have ever had a visit from a representative of any other religion or non-faith group to take part in religious observance.

As a parent, I have been invited to attend some school assemblies which are examples of religious observance, usually at Christmas and Easter. There may be other religious observance events happening throughout the year to which parents are not invited. It is not communicated to parents when one is going to occur.

At these assemblies the minister brings a bible with him which he holds in his hand and talks to the pupils about the 'special book'. He gives a sermon then asks the pupils to pray. This is not a few moments of 'silent reflection'. The minister leads the prayer in the manner he would in a church setting, expressly praising, worshipping and appealing to the Christian God and Jesus Christ.

One teacher at the school, who seems to teach RME across the school, has directly stated to me her interpretation of the terms of the legislature on religious observance as being about the 'spiritual development' of all school children, but that we are a 'Christian country'. Given that the school not only gives a bias to Christianity in religious observances but that they are actually exclusively Christian, this suggests that for her the 'inclusive' individual

spiritual development of all the children at our school is to be interpreted as the proper development toward accepting Christianity as truth.

In the interests of parity of esteem I spoke with the school's previous deputy head in 2011, and the current one in 2012, about the possibility of a visit to the school from a humanist education representative, either as part of religious education, or to lead an assembly for religious observance. Both deputies showed an interest, and I gave them both two packs of teaching resources produced by the Humanist Society of Scotland and the British Humanist Association. However the Humanist Society of Scotland has never been contacted by our school, and I have not received any feedback as to whether any teachers have used the resources in RME lessons. Neither of my children have ever taken part in RME lessons about non-faith life philosophies.”

Patrick Harvie, MSP for Glasgow

“The values of religious and secular worldviews do sometimes come into conflict, and education is often the issue at stake. The human rights involved require a balance between the right of believers to follow their religion and the right of children to their education. These rights are not absolutes, and striking the balance is a matter of judgement.

“Some people’s religious doctrine would lead them to promote misogyny or homophobia; our society does not allow this – we come down on the side of education not religious freedom. Others would push creationism, telling children that evolution is false or that the world is six thousand years old. These ideas undermine science education, and again we seek to protect children’s rights instead of parents’ religion.

“At one level these dangers are cultural, but with so-called “faith healing” or “miracle cures” the danger becomes very practical indeed. Peddling such nonsense anywhere can put lives at risk, but doing so in schools is even more irresponsible as it can shape young people’s attitudes to health in ways which last a lifetime.

“I’d like to see a fully secular education system in which religion isn’t promoted. But even those who disagree should be deeply concerned at attempts to turn schools from places of enlightenment into places of superstition and anti-science propaganda.”