

Edinburgh Secular Society

Challenging religious privilege

Colin Emerson
Acting Chair

David Lord
Secretary

Education, Children and Families Committee
Committee Clerk
City of Edinburgh Council,

Sent by email

3rd March 2014

Request for Deputation – Education, Children and Families Committee

Sir/Madam,

Please receive this request from Edinburgh Secular Society (ESS) to make a deputation to the above committee on Tuesday, 4 March 2014.

We wish to make a presentation in relation to agenda item 7.1 – Religious Observance in Non-Denominational Schools Committee Report.

The deputation will consist of Colin Emerson and Norman Bonney.

Should you require further information please contact me at the email or mobile number listed below.

Regards

Colin Emerson

Acting Chair – Edinburgh Secular Society

Correspondence: 17 Swanston Park EDINBURGH EH10 7BR

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Colin Emerson
Chair

Neil Barber
Media Officer

To: Committee Clerk
Education, Children & Families Committee
City of Edinburgh Council

cc: Cllr Paul Godzik; Cllr Cathy Fullerton

03 Mar 2014

Re: **Meeting report by Director of Children & Families - 04 March 2014**
Correction item to para 1.3 submitted by Edinburgh Secular Society

ESS respectfully wishes to point to a factual error in paragraph 1.3.

- 1.3 Two petitions were tabled at the Council's Petitions Committee on 3 June 2013. The first (PE1487) was presented by a parent who is a member of the Edinburgh Secular Society and was entitled "Remove Religious Observance from non denominational schools". This petition received 896 valid signatures. The second petition was tabled by Ewan Aitken. It received 1522 valid signatures. [para 1.3 continues on next page]. Subsequently, on 28 January 2014, the Church of Scotland and the Humanist Society made a joint submission to the Petition Committee of the Scottish Government calling for Religious Observance to be renamed Time for Reflection.

Ewan Aitken did not table the second [counter] petition. It was sent in by an Edinburgh parent, Mr Gary Bennett, who did not appear at before the petitions committee at the first hearing of Ms Wikman's petition on 3 June 2013. Mr Bennett simply lodged a written submission [on 25 Feb 2013].

Extract from *CEC Petitions Committee Minutes*, Monday, 03 June 2013 reports:

'3 (c) Deputation Request by the Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education

Ewan Aitken on behalf of the Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education was heard as a deputation in regard to *both* petitions. He tabled additional information for members of the Committee.'

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On a point of order:

ESS deems that referencing the joint CoS/HSS submission [dated 24 Jan 2014] to a Scottish Government petition* has no place in this CEC report.

Nevertheless, where such reference is made, it should not be without fully referencing that the subject of that petition was on **a different proposal** altogether [to have an opt-in to RO], and **not Time for Reflection**.

ESS holds that PE1487 has no direct relevance to Ms Wikman's petition now before CEC.

Nevertheless, since this CEC report now includes a reference to PE1487, we feel strongly that it is limiting and discriminating for the officers' report to focus on one submission only.

The CoS/HSS submission referenced therein is merely one of over 40 submissions from such diverse groups as the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, and, indeed, the joint petitioners of this petition now before CEC elected members. Many of those other submissions voiced similar concerns about religious observance in schools.

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Moreover, a later submission from HSS alone on 28 Jan 2014 appears to rescind or modify somewhat the apparent intent and unity in the earlier joint CoS/HSS submission; as, too, does a separate, later announcement on the CoS website.

In fact, in its submission to PE1487, ESS continues to fully support the retention of RE whilst simultaneously calling for the complete removal of RO from schools. This is consistent with this petition now before CEC.

Finally, this call by CoS/HSS in Jan 2014 to use Time for Reflection as the name for RO changes nothing. It was a recommendation already detailed in 21 February 2011 in **Guidance letter: Curriculum for Excellence - Provision Of Religious Observance In Schools**; Laura Stewart: Scottish Government, Learning Directorate Curriculum Division **. Schools should have be using this term for the past three years.

* Scottish Government petition PE1487 lodged 20 June 2013 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 by making Religious Observance (RO) in public schools an "Opt-In" activity rather than an "Opt-Out" one.
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/religiousobservance>

** <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/920/0113848.pdf>

**** ENDS ****

- ESS campaigns for a secular Edinburgh and a secular Scotland. It challenges religious privilege in the public arena.
- ESS is affiliated to the National Secular Society, although views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the NSS.