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Monday 2nd May 2014

A response to Religious Observance Policy - Public Consultation

Please find attached a response on behalf of the Humanist Society Scotland (HSS), an organisation representing the views of millions of Scots, and with hundreds of family members across Fife, we value the chance to respond to your consultation.

The document which follows sets out HSS's response to your policy consultation on Religious Observance.

In broad terms we welcome this forward-looking approach by Fife Council. It is clear that Fife Council has given due consideration to the rights of religious and non-religious young people, and recognised the importance of approaching these issues in a balanced and thoughtful manner.

We would suggest that at 20 pages, this document is quite lengthy, and perhaps our suggested changes may offer scope to condense it.

You may know earlier this year the Humanist Society Scotland released a joint statement with the Church of Scotland to call for legislative change to Religious Observance, creating a formal 'Time for Reflection'. To date this has not been achieved, and as such the HSS remains critical of the practice of Religious Observance.

We offer our comments here as a means of advice, based on the frequent feedback from our members, of whom we have many in the Fife Council area.

Fife Council is to be particularly congratulated on the inclusion of a clear policy position on prayer within school. This is something which HSS will be promoting across Scotland.

I would be more than welcome to provide further assistance to yourself, or representatives in Fife Council. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Gary McLelland
Education Policy Officer
Humanist Society Scotland



(Your) Section	Current wording	Suggested wording	Advisory notes
1.1	“It also reminds schools and local authorities that parents continue to have the right to withdraw their child from any provision of Religious Observance.”	“It also reminds schools and local authorities that parents continue to have the right to withdraw their child from any provision of Religious Observance or religious and moral education. Schools also have a legal duty to inform parents of this right to withdraw in the school hand book as per the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. ”	The right to withdraw is an important principle, and more prominence should be given to it.
1.1	“The most recent census showed that Christianity remains the main religious influence in Scotland.”	This sentence serves no useful purpose, and should be removed.	The 2011 census showed that 53% of Scots identify as Christian. Although the more detailed 2011 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey puts the percentage of non-religious Scots at 53. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey also shows that young people are much less likely to be religious.
1.1	“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.”	“It should be sensitive to our traditions and origins and should seek to reflect these but it must equally be sensitive to individual beliefs, whether these are religious or non-religious. ”	‘Spirituality’ and ‘faith’ are loose and ill-defined terms, although they are used by the Scottish Government, we advise avoiding these potentially confusing terms, in pursuit of clarity. The term ‘belief’ can be used when referring to religious and non-religious beliefs, and we advise Fife Council to explicitly mention ‘non-



			religious beliefs’.
1.2	<p>“The Aims of TfR/Religious Observance, as defined in the RO Review Group (2005) paper are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; • To express and celebrate the shared values of the school community” 	N/a	Again, the term ‘spirituality’ is very vague. The Education team should consider the development of clearer language. How, for example, does one measure ‘spiritual development’?
1.3	<i>In its entirety.</i>	“The name of Religious Observance stems from the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is beyond the remit of the Local Authority to change an Act of Parliament.”	This section is too long and vague, the suggested changes convey they necessary information.
1.3	“Within the denominational sector, the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are used to help young people to respond to their human search for meaning, purpose and truth in life.”	“Within the denominational sector, the doctrinal teachings of that particular religious organisation are used to teach young people.”	When speaking generally, it should be noted that of Scotland’s 370 denominational schools, only 366 are Roman Catholic.
1.4	“Within the Roman Catholic school the guidance offered by the Roman Catholic Church provides a clear framework for the school’s understanding of its Catholic Christian faith and of the values and virtues which it promotes.”	“Within denominational schools the guidance offered by the particular religious organisations’ provides a clear framework for the school’s understanding of its religious belief and of the values which it promotes.”	See previous.
1.4	“It is the case that	N/a	As an organisation



	<p>different communities hold values that are particular to their own tradition. These values and the right of people to hold them should be acknowledged.</p> <p>Likewise, as stated in the Letter of Guidance (Feb 2011), "Chaplains' own religious stances should be respected and they should not be asked, or expected, to compromise their beliefs" whilst being sensitive to the variety of beliefs within a school community."</p>		<p>we value freedom of expression. However, whilst in a position of power with children or young people, it should be expected that any visitors or chaplains should adhere to the school/LAs Code of Conduct or Equality and Diversity Policy.</p>
1.4	<p>"There are clear links that can be made between the aims and values of TfR/RO and RME.</p> <p>However it should be noted that it is not the responsibility of the RME department in secondary schools to deliver TfR/RO and the delivery of assemblies is not an appropriate mechanism to deliver the RME curriculum area."</p>	<p>"There are clear links that can be made between the aims and values of TfR/RO and RME.</p> <p>However it should be noted that it is not the responsibility of the RME department in secondary schools to deliver TfR/RO and the delivery of assemblies is not an appropriate mechanism to deliver the RME curriculum area. Children/young people who choose to opt-out from RO should not be disadvantaged in their experience of RME."</p>	<p>We recognise that RO/RME may complement each other, but care must be taken to ensure that they remain two distinct activities.</p>
2.1	<p>"The Report of Religious Observance Review Group (2004) challenges schools</p>	<p>"The Report of Religious Observance Review Group (2004) challenges schools to be creative and to adopt team working approaches to</p>	<p>The term 'faith group' is outdated, and a more suitable term is 'belief group', as per the Equality Act</p>



	to be creative and to adopt team working approaches to consider questions of diversity, location and the rhythm of the school year in order to enable spiritual development. The report also allows for the inclusion of faith groups in the informal curriculum.”	consider questions of diversity, location and the rhythm of the school year in order to enable spiritual development. The report also allows for the inclusion of belief groups in the informal curriculum.”	2010. This term is also a respectful term for religious and non-religious groups collectively.
2.1	<p>“In addition within the Roman Catholic sector the following are relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration of Mass on Feast Days or other occasions; • Prayer services or para-liturgies for particular purposes.” 	Remove completely.	Arrangements for denominational schools are currently the prerogative of the religious organisation. It is not the business of Fife Council.
2.4	“Within the Roman Catholic setting, liturgical celebration will take place within the school community following guidance by Church authorities.”	Remove completely.	See previous.
3.1	<i>In its entirety.</i>	Remove completely.	<p>We believe the RME/RO Steering Group has overreached itself, and should not create the novel practice of RO in nursery.</p> <p>We particularly object to the suggestion that nurserys should be “marking significant religious celebrations”, and reitetate our concerns over the</p>



			use of the term 'spirituality'.
3.2	"Schools will be provided with specific guidance on how to ensure that pupils from a range of faiths are supported."	"Schools will be provided with specific guidance on how to ensure that pupils from a range of beliefs are supported."	See previous comments.
4.1	"Each member of the chaplaincy team will be able to draw on the rich resources of their own religious tradition."	"Each member of the chaplaincy team will be able to draw on the rich resources of their own belief tradition."	HSS is in the process of forming a policy on school chaplains. We note however that school chaplains are available throughout the non-religious sector, as such we object to the use of the exclusivist 'religious tradition' term.
4.1	"Within the Roman Catholic school the chaplaincy provides sacramental, pastoral and curricular support ensuring the school is directly linked to the local parish. This has been clarified in the March 2009 report from the Scottish Catholic Education Service."	"Arrangements for chaplains in denominational schools are overseen by the particular religious organisation."	See previous comments.
4.1	"Chaplaincy teams are a core resource for schools. The Chaplaincy can help a school community explore the complex notion of shared community values within a school. The chaplaincy may of course support a wide range of curricular areas in the school including	Delete in entirety.	HSS challenged the assumption that chaplaincy teams are a 'core resource'. We also strongly challenge the requirement for each particular school to establish a chaplaincy team.



	<p>Religious and Moral Education and Personal and Social Development.</p> <p>Consequently it is the expectation of the authority that all schools will have a chaplaincy in place. The Education Officer with responsibility for TfR/Religious Observance will support schools requiring further assistance in establishing a chaplaincy.”</p>		
4.1	<p>“The discussion should be based on the premise that the way TfR/RO in schools is implemented should be justifiable on educational grounds.”</p>	Delete in its entirety.	This should not have to be stated in an education policy.
4.1	<p>“In Roman Catholic schools, chaplains are appointed by the Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, whilst in the non-denominational sector they are invited to participate in school life by the Headteacher.”</p>	Delete in its entirety.	See previous comments.
4.1	<p>“An approach seeking to convert an audience to one faith or another is not appropriate in the non-denominational</p>	Change references to ‘faith’, to ‘belief’.	See previous comments.



	sector. It is important that clergy from the major world faiths are able to participate with integrity in any TfR/RO experience when invited to do so by the Headteacher.”		
4.1	“Chaplains should be made aware of relevant school policies such as those on Child Protection and Religious and Moral Education.”	“Chaplains should be made aware of relevant school policies such as those on Child Protection, Religious and Moral Education and Equality and Diversity. ”	See previous comments.
4.3	<i>In its entirety.</i>	N/a	This requires clarification. Does ‘curricular support’ refer only to RME? If this policy is suggesting expanding the role of chaplain to curricular support for all subject, HSS would strongly object to this.
4.3	“Children and young people could usefully engage in research into belief, using the chaplain as a resource in schools.”	N/a	This sentence is very vague, further clarification needed.
5.1	“Within the Roman Catholic school organised acts of worship are considered appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school, supporting the development of the school's aims, mission, values and ethos. These acts of	Delete in its entirety.	See previous comments.



	worship will include the school community's celebration of daily prayer and of Mass which will always be at the core of the Roman Catholic school's religious observance."		
5.1	"In the non-denominational sector the TfR/RO programme within a school should provide contexts for developing these themes with the possibility of organised acts of worship taking place within the informal curriculum."	Delete in its entirety.	The position was clear in the first section of 5.1. Pupils should not be expected to attend organized acts of worship, either as part of RO or RME.
5.2	"In non-denominational schools Headteachers should consider requests for organised acts of worship positively and make suitable arrangements, in consultation with the school community representatives e.g. the school's working group, according to availability of appropriate personnel and accommodation."	Delete in its entirety.	There are many opportunities for acts of worship outside of school. School is not an appropriate place for acts of worship.

