

**PE1498/D**

St Leonard's Primary School Parent Council Email of 10 February 2014

Dear Mr Howlett,

Firstly let me introduce myself - I am Mrs Mhairi Lloyd and I am Chairperson of the Parent Council in St. Leonards Primary School, East Kilbride.

It was brought to my attention at our Parent Council meeting on 22nd January 2014 that a petition had been made to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee on 14th January 2014 entitled "Local Authority Education Committees (Religious Representation) (PE1498)". The petition was raised by Mr Colin Emerson of the Edinburgh Secular Society.

I have looked at the petition and other information which relates to it and I have been asked by my Parent Council to reply on their behalf and express our Parent Council views on the petition and the discussions which took place on 14th January.

As a Parent Council of a Catholic Primary school we were alarmed and concerned at the proposal put forward by the petition to remove Religious Representatives from education committees in Scotland. It is our opinion that to remove Religious Representatives or to limit their voting rights would hugely undermine the Christian values of our education system and subsequently our country as a whole. Mr Emerson states that Religious Representatives on education committees are discriminatory on the basis that they represent mainly the Church of Scotland and Catholic Church and therefore Christian Religions. Mr Emerson refers to the changing demographics within Scotland in regards to religion. According to the 2011 census stating that 37% of the general population are of no religion. However using the same census information the Christian population of Scotland totals 54% (Church of Scotland 32%, Catholic Church 16% and Other Christian 6%). Surely it makes sense that representatives are from mainly Christian organisations as the majority of Scottish people describe themselves as Christian. Therefore it is not unusual to have representatives on education committees which reflect the values of the country, and Scotland is still a Christian Country.

Mr Emerson and Mr Norman Bonney (also of the Edinburgh Secular Society), make reference to the fact that some education committee decisions and votes have been dictated to by the unelected Church Representatives, and that Church Representatives hold a "balance of power" in some education committees, and this therefore is a reason for removing Church representation. Surely within a Christian Country who's education system is for the academic, moral and ethical education of our children it is more beneficial to have "Christian values" included in the decision making processes of our education committees?

Even by Mr Bonney's own admission "...no systematic study - as far as I am aware - has been carried out on the role of such religious representatives on local authority education committees". (Mr Bonney - Edinburgh Secular Society).

Surely then a full and proper study of what benefits these Religious Representatives bring to our education committees should be fully considered before a petition such as this is even brought forward for consideration before the Parliament.

From the point of view of our Parent Council we feel that the issues raised above require much more information gathering, and much more input, particularly from the Religious Representatives' Churches. For a country, whose education system is admired all around the world, it seems detrimental to the fundamentals of our Scottish Education system that the religious beliefs of our country be ignored.

I trust this information will be sufficient for your purposes, however if you require any further clarification or I can be of any further assistance then please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to further updates on the petition concerned.

Regards,

Mrs Mhairi Lloyd  
Parent Council Chairperson