

PE1530/BB

Learning Directorate

Curriculum, Assessment and Gaelic Division



Public Petitions Committee

By e-mail petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



Your ref:

Our ref:

15 December 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

PE1530 – GUIDANCE ON HOW CREATIONISM IS PRESENTED IN SCHOOLS

Thank you for your letter of 12 November 2014 about the Scottish Parliament Petition PE1530, *calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to issue official guidance to bar the presentation in Scottish publicly funded schools of separate creation and of Young Earth doctrines as viable alternatives to the established science of evolution, common descent, and deep time.*

At their meeting on 11 November 2014, Committee members were interested in whether the Scottish Government is of the view that a system where there is discretion on what is taught and how it is taught is robust enough to ensure that all children receive the broadest education based on rational thought. In addition, the Scottish Government was invited to review the situation if this ceased to be the case.

Curriculum and Practitioner Guidance

As the Committee will be aware, the Scottish Government and its agencies set the national framework for education in Scotland. Statutory responsibility for delivery of education rests with education authorities and individual schools. There is no intention, either stated or implied, for schools to limit classroom discussion and debate about complex, challenging or controversial topics such as those posed by Creationism. For example, within the context of the delivery of the “Experiences and Outcomes” in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Religious and Moral Education it is likely that concepts of creationism and evolution, will be discussed in a variety of contexts. Moreover, Creationism is not identified as a scientific theory or a

topic within Curriculum for Excellence. Evolution however is specifically covered in the “Experiences and Outcomes” for the sciences.

Education Scotland’s guidance in the form of the “Principles and Practice” paper for science includes - among the purposes of studying science - that children and young people should “demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of the big ideas and concepts of the sciences.”

Furthermore, all teachers are required to adhere to GTC Scotland’s *Code of Professionalism and Conduct* which describes to the profession and members of the public the standards of conduct and competence expected of teachers. Teachers are required, as a condition of maintaining their registration, to periodically confirm to the GTCS that they are maintaining their professional skills and knowledge as set out in the Standard for Full Registration. Notwithstanding that teachers will hold a range of personal beliefs, the Code includes a requirement that **all** teachers should help pupils understand different views, perspectives and experiences.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland’s science and Religious and Moral Education (RME) teams, along with HMI Subject Specialists, have engaged extensively with schools over the last two years. This includes visits to over 40 establishments as evidence gathering for the *Sciences 3-18 Curriculum Impact Report*; five sciences “conversation days” involving more than 250 stakeholders and Education Scotland engagement with many hundreds of teachers through events designed to support primary science and the new SQA sciences National Qualifications. No concerns have been expressed to Education Scotland staff, either from the RME or Science teams, on any of these occasions about the teaching of Creationism in Scottish schools. Also, no school or teacher has sought guidance on this matter from Education Scotland.

Guidance

I can therefore confirm that there are no plans to issue guidance to schools or education authorities to prevent the presentation of Creationism, Intelligent Design or similar doctrines by teachers or school visitors. The evidence available suggests that guidance on these matters is unnecessary. However, Education Scotland will continue to monitor, through the school inspection process and by other means, any instances where schools are not ensuring the teaching of science is based on well-established science and scientific principles.

Child Protection

In relation to wider child protection matters that may arise in connection with external volunteer visitors to schools, it should be noted that education practitioners, school staff and staff in other learning settings play a crucial role in the support and protection of children. The National Child Protection Guidance was revised in May this year. The new guidance clearly sets out national expectations for local partners to put in place local strategies and adequate risk assessment procedures.

Parents

Parent Councils support and work with schools and represent the views of parents. They know the local community and the parent forum (the name for parents who have children at

the school). They may be consulted on school policies. Views of parents would be collated before presenting these views to school management and/or the local authority. Parent Councils should have mechanisms for gathering the views of the parent forum about the standards and quality of education provided by the school and on other areas which are of interest or concern. You may wish to refer to the 2006 Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement)] Act 2006 – <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/5>

It is possible for parents, carers, young people and others to make a section 70 (of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980) complaint to Ministers where it is believed that there has been a failure to fulfil a statutory duty. This does not apply to common law duties such as a duty of care or to challenge a decision made by the authority which the complainant does not agree with. Ministers have the discretion to make an order to enforce the statutory duty. The process for a section 70 is: a complaint is made and evidence is gathered from the education provider and the complainer. If it appears there is a failure then Education Scotland will investigate and advise Ministers. Ministers then make a decision to either reject the complaint, consider if an order will be made to ensure the duty is carried out and require the education provider to ensure the duty is met. If this does not happen by the specified date then Ministers may ensure the arrangements are made with the costs and expenses being recovered as a debt.

Parent Councils can help facilitate the links for invited speakers. A good example of this would be for links to employers for talks about the workplace or work experience. It is for the teachers to decide who is allowed to speak to children as it would be used as a teaching mechanism. So Parent Councils would not have any automatic influence although they could voice any concerns. It is not likely parents would be aware of speakers routinely in advance. However, good practice could be that the views of parents are sought regarding a controversial speaker but this is not a statutory requirement.

Conclusion

I can confirm that there are a number of policies and safeguards in place to ensure that children and young people receive a broad and balanced general education. Safeguards include; school managers having oversight of curriculum planning and resources; local authorities with robust complaints procedures, independent school inspections and the development of curriculum materials through a collegiate approach that provides for early identification of any inappropriate material.

I trust you will find this helpful.

Yours faithfully

Tim Simons

Head of Curriculum Unit, Learning Directorate