

PE2129/D: Standardise criteria and consultations for assessing demand for denominational schools

Petitioner written submission, 25 April 2025

Thank you for your continued consideration of Petition PE2129. I write in response to the Scottish Government's recent submission, and to clarify the scale and significance of the injustice faced by the Catholic community in Aberdeen.

1. A Global Church, A Neglected City

Catholicism is the world's largest Christian denomination, with more than 1.3 billion adherents globally. In Scotland, we are a visible and long-established faith community. Yet Aberdeen remains the only major Scottish city without a single Catholic secondary school — not even one, not ever!

The recent death of His Holiness Pope Francis, a moral leader respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, should prompt deep reflection. His papacy championed equality, justice, and the inclusion of the marginalised. His passing is not just symbolic — it reminds us how far we still must go to ensure that Catholic families in Aberdeen are treated fairly and equally.

2. The Numbers Are Clear

- Nearly 20,000 practising Catholics live in Aberdeen (census data)
- Over 60,000 people of other faiths choose Catholic education for its values-based ethos
- Aberdeen has three Catholic primary schools — all oversubscribed, with a 50% cap on Catholic enrolment
- No Catholic secondary school has ever existed in Aberdeen
- Dundee, with a similar Catholic population, has 2 Catholic secondary schools and 11 Catholic primaries
- A formal Council consultation received over 1,300 supportive responses
- A public petition has gathered over 1,000 additional signatures
- Total: Over 2,300 voices calling for equality — and still ignored.

3. Exclusion and Discrimination

During the consultation, Aberdeen City Council chose to disregard responses from:

- Non-Catholic parents who actively support Catholic education
- Grandparents, despite many being primary carers or guardians

This narrowing of community input is not “local democracy” — it is institutional bias. It undermines the purpose of consultation and excludes legitimate voices simply because they don't fit a narrowly defined criteria.

4. This Is Not a Local Issue Anymore

This is no longer a question of local authority discretion. It is now a national failure to deliver educational equity to a protected faith community.

The Scottish Government cannot hide behind “localism” when local systems have demonstrably failed to uphold fairness or equality. If any other protected group had been treated this way — ignored, filtered out of consultation, and systematically denied provision — the response would be immediate.

We ask for no privilege. Only equal treatment under the law and in practice.

We respectfully request that the Committee:

- Recognise this as a systemic failure of educational equity
- Recommend urgent ministerial engagement and an independent review
- Ensure Catholic children in Aberdeen are finally granted the same educational opportunities as their peers elsewhere in Scotland