

PE1623/O

Scottish Government letter of 8 December 2016

Thank you for your letter of 25 November in respect of Petition PE1623 from the Scottish Secular Society calling for changes to the current practices under Section 124 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 which requires that local authority education committees must include members nominated by various churches.

You have requested the Government's view on Petition PE1623 and in particular confirmation of the Government's current position on the subject and whether and how the issues raised in the petition will be addressed as part of the current consultation on the Governance of school education.

From an education perspective, in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 the responsibility for the delivery of education rests with local authorities. The 1980 Act provides for the establishment of denominational schools if this is desired by either the local authority or by representation from others. It includes certain requirements in respect of changes to the provision of denominational schools and the church has a role in the appointment of teachers in denominational schools. There is also a provision within the Act with regard to religious education in the curriculum and religious observance.

Therefore, at the time of the relevant legislation, the involvement of religious representatives, as set out in the 1973 Act, in the decision making process at local authority level was viewed as providing support to the authority in discharging its duties in respect of meeting the educational needs of all children in their area and supporting the desire by parents for both denominational and non-denominational schools. The Government has no plans to change these provisions.

The Education Governance Review of early years and school education was launched on 13 September and runs until 6 January 2017 and is seeking views on the national framework, including the legislative framework, that the government should put in place to support Scottish Education. It is the intention to take a whole system approach by considering the national framework required to both support and empower schools and teachers to deliver the best outcomes for our children and young people.

A response from the Scottish Secular Society would be welcomed and like all other responses this will be considered in the wider context of any proposed changes which supports the Government's commitment to improve education for all and close the attainment gap.