

PE1623/U

Glasgow Jewish Representative Council (GJRC) letter of 10 January 2017

GJRC thanks the Public Petitions Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission regarding the above petition.

1. In the first instance we wish to draw attention to the phrase 'church appointees.' Across Scotland there are a wide range of diverse religious communities, in addition to the various Christian communities, and in some local authority areas these amount to quite sizable minorities. Therefore we would wish to see the term replaced by 'faith community appointees.'
2. We recognise that Scotland is an increasingly diverse country and Local Authority areas contain numerous faith communities and believe the obligation on local authorities to appoint faith community representatives to Education Committees should be retained.
3. We note that a very small number of Local Authority Education Committees already have members from minority faith communities. In East Renfrewshire, where the majority of the Jewish Community live and which has the only Jewish denominational primary school in Scotland, has had a nominee from the Jewish community for around 20yrs.
4. Members of minority faith communities often experience disadvantage and from our own experience we know that Jewish children are too often the victims of race and/or religious hatred. Not all of these issues are dealt with satisfactorily by the relevant school or Local Authority officials, and we note that there is still an unacceptable level of ignorance about the Jewish religion and Jewish community in Scotland.
5. From the work we do and relationships we have with colleagues in other minority faith communities, we know they experience many similar issues. Therefore we believe that it is important for minority faith communities to be able to voice their concerns in a statutory setting where they are guaranteed a say in educational provision which will affect them. We believe that Local Authority Education Committees, as the key decision making bodies governing the relevant areas of ethos, curriculum, and discipline, are the most appropriate place for this to happen. In addition, they are best placed to have responsibility for ensuring the Local Authority's compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty to promote good relations between those with protected characteristics.
6. In order to reflect the diversity of faith communities and tackle such negative experiences, we suggest that—
 - every faith community representative on a Local Authority Education Committee be mandated to give consideration to the general needs of all faith communities in their local area, in addition to the specific needs of their own community (this is currently the practice in East Renfrewshire)
 - the setting up of a faith advisory panel in each area to advise Local Authority Education Committees on matters relating to religion. Given that

in some situations there are very few children from some faith communities in an area, this body could liaise with larger communities in other areas.