



Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-634
Ein cyf/Our ref HL/00815/15

William Powell AM
Chair - Petitions Committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

12 May 2015

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 30 April on behalf of the Petitions Committee seeking my views on the ability for parents to access a secular education for their children.

I currently have no plans to change the legal status of collective worship in schools nor do I plan to allow the introduction of completely non religious state schools.

Religious education in the twenty-first century encourages pupils to explore a range of philosophical, theological, ethical, and spiritual questions in a reflective, analytical, balanced way that stimulates questioning and debate. It also focuses on understanding humanity's quest for meaning, the positive aspects of multi-faith/multicultural understanding and pupils' own understanding and responses to life and religion. Parents continue to have the legal right to withdraw their children from Religious Education if they wish.

Presently, the Education Reform Act 1988, the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Welsh Office Circular 10/94 set out the legal requirements for collective worship in schools in Wales. These requirements apply to pupils in maintained schools other than special schools. The requirements do not apply to colleges of further education or to nursery schools or nursery classes in infant or primary schools.

The law states that most acts of collective worship in each term should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian nature', the aim of collective worship in schools is described in Welsh Office Circular 10/94 as providing 'the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs as well as giving children time to reflect'.

However, those leading collective worship in schools should be sensitive to the range of beliefs and non-beliefs held by pupils in the school. Collective worship should therefore give pupils the opportunity to worship without encouraging them to do something that is against the teachings of their religion or beliefs.

A parent can request that their child is excused from collective worship and schools must agree to such requests in all circumstances. Parents do not have to give reasons. The school may, in agreement with parents, provide alternative arrangements for worship for one or more pupils that are excused, but is not obliged to do so.

On 25 February I welcomed the publication of Professor Graham Donaldson's Successful Futures Report, which looked at the development of new curriculum and assessment arrangements for Wales. In his report, Professor Donaldson recommended that Religious Education should continue to be a statutory part of the curriculum.

There is currently a "Great Debate" on Professor Donaldson's recommendations and while this initial phase will close on 8 May, there will be opportunities for interested parties to feed in the development of the new curriculum as work progresses.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis'.

Huw Lewis AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills