

PE1487/G

Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE1487 on religious observance in schools

Response, Aberdeen City Council (Education, Culture and Sport)

- **What are your views on what the petition seeks and the discussions that took place at the meeting on 3 September?**

At present Aberdeen City schools abide by the legislation as it is set down and work within this framework and at the same time endeavour to ensure Curriculum for Excellence is delivered whilst giving students the best opportunities to achieve and attainment.

Curriculum for Excellence sets out four capacities:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

Within curriculum design schools ensure the seven principles are met:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalisation and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance.

It should be noted that schools must offer breadth to the curriculum but also ensure personalisation and choice is catered for.

Learners, through Curriculum for Excellence, have six entitlements:-

- Every child and young person is entitled to experience a curriculum which is coherent from 3 to 18

- Every child and young person is entitled to experience a broad general education
- Every young person is entitled to experience a senior phase where he or she can continue to develop the four capacities and also obtain qualifications
- Every child and young person is entitled to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, with a continuous focus on literacy and numeracy and health and wellbeing
- Every child and young person is entitled to personal support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which *Curriculum for Excellence* can provide
- Every young person is entitled to support in moving into a positive and sustained destination

A small number of our students currently “Opt out” of Religious Observance and, within the Curriculum for Excellence framework, continue to study despite not being involved in religious observance. These students partake in a range of activity pupils are involved in during this time.

- **How many pupils do not attend religious observance in schools within your local authority as a result of their parents choosing to opt out?**

The numbers of parents opting out are small in number. The schools who responded noted returns from ‘nil’ to 15.

The numbers are not high in either primary or secondary sector and often the “opt out” is only at certain points in the year- i.e. during Christmas period and specifically during any church services at that time. Alternative resources, learning and staffing is always available during these times to ensure that learning continues for all students.

- **What provision is made for an alternative activity for pupils who do not attend religious observance in schools within your local authority, and what issues prevent a suitable alternative activity being provided?**

As per the flexibility provided by Curriculum for Excellence, both in terms of the range of curricular areas to study and the level at which students study at being appropriate to their needs, students can always find suitable alternative activity. In some cases there is course and project work which can be worked on whilst in other case there is alternative curricular provision. Some students use the opportunity to access other resources such as the library.

Staffing issues can present a difficult, as is noted on some responses from schools. A range of staff may supervise alternative activities i.e. DHTs and PSAs under the supervision of class teachers.

In a small number of cases, parents have kept their students off school. However, it should be noted that alternative provision and staffing would always be made available to students and no parent should feel obliged to do this.