

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref KW/01370/17
Toby Keynes

toby.keynes@hslid.org.uk

August 2017

Dear Toby Keynes

Thank you for your email of 17 August in relation to the petition P-05-757 to remove the obligation on schools in Wales to hold acts of religious worship which is currently being considered by the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee.

In Wales, collective worship in schools should be sensitive to the range of beliefs held by pupils in the school and should give pupils the opportunity to worship without encouraging them to do something that is against their beliefs. For example, times of prayer may be left open-ended for pupils to say their own prayers silently or to reflect on moral or philosophical issues. Parents are entitled to remove their children from acts of collective worship, in accordance with section 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The responsibility for the planning and delivery of acts of collective worship rests with schools, and those leading acts of collective worship are required to be sensitive to the views or beliefs of all learners.

The Petitions Committee are currently considering two separate petitions in relation to collective worship. The one you raised with me in your email in relation to removing the obligation on schools to hold acts of collective worship and another petition which calls for religious assemblies in state schools to be kept as 'opt-out' and 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' I will be responding to the Petitions Committee over the coming weeks.

You also mention that the British Humanist Association have been seeking a meeting with me to discuss issues around collective worship, the new curriculum and faith schools in Wales.

Kathy Riddick and the British Humanist are currently involved in legal proceedings with Vale of Glamorgan Council in relation to her application to the Council's SACRE. I am aware of the case and await its outcome with interest.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am currently considering the law in this area in light of the wider curriculum reforms and that process has not yet been concluded. As part of this process, I am committed to engaging meaningfully with those who have an interest in this policy area, including the British Humanist Association. I'll provide further detail about how that engagement will take place in due course.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Williams AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education
From: Kerry Davies
Ext: 256280

[Ref] KW/01370/17
CC: John Pugsley
Manon Jones
Steve Price
Claire Rowlands

Date: 4/9/17

KW/01370/17 from Toby Keynes, Chair, Humanist & Secularist Liberal Democrats

1. Toby Keynes has written to you in relation to the petition P-05-757 to remove the obligation on schools in Wales to hold acts of religious worship, which is currently being considered by the National Assembly.
2. That petition against collective worship was posted on the National Assembly for Wales' website on 21 April by two pupils from Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf. The petition closed on 18 June, and has amassed 1,333 signatures.
3. A petition in favour of retaining the current arrangements for collective worship was also posted on the National Assembly for Wales' website on 22 May by Iraj Irfan, which called for religious assemblies in state schools to be kept as 'opt-out' and 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', whilst considering ways to ensure that they continue to be relevant to people of different faiths and no faiths. The petition closed on 21 June, and amassed 2,209 signatures.
4. On 27 June, the National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee considered the petitions. The Committee Chair wrote to you on 24th July to ask:
 - if the Welsh Government will consider reviewing the current law and guidelines surrounding collective worship; and
 - whether any consideration has been given to the compatibility of the current requirements with human rights law, in particular the right to Freedom of Belief.