

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-765
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/00836/17
Mike Hedges AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk

May 2017

Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 23 May about Petition P-05-765, to keep the current guidelines for religious assemblies/ collective worship.

I would like to thank you for welcoming my views before the Petitions Committee gives the petition its formal consideration.

My view on collective worship is that it should be sensitive to the range of beliefs and non-beliefs held by pupils in the school and should give pupils the opportunity to worship, without encouraging them to do something that is against the teachings of their own religion or 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.

The specific legislative requirements for acts of collective worship in schools are set out in Section 70 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, which says there must be a daily act of collective worship, and Schedule 20 of the Education Act 1996, which sets out the nature of collective worship.

The responsibility for the planning and delivery of acts of collective worship rests with individual schools. The law states that most acts of collective worship in each term should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian nature' and therefore, it is acceptable if occasionally an act of collective worship is not clearly linked to the Christian faith.

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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.

Parents can request for their child to be withdrawn from collective worship and schools must agree to such requests in all circumstances.

Yours sincerely

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

**To: Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary
for Education**
From: Abi Williams
Ext: 616067

KW/00836/17
CC: Claire Rowlands
John Pugsley
David Heath
Manon Jones
Pauline Smith

Date: 24 May 2017

KW/00836/17 – Letter from Mike Hedges AM

1. Mike Hedges AM, Chair of the Petitions Committee, has written to you about the following petition which has been received by the Petitions Committee. Mike Hedges AM has welcomed your views on the petition before the committee gives it their formal consideration.

“We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to keep religious assemblies in state schools in Wales as ‘opt-out’ and ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’, while considering ways to ensure that they continue to be relevant to people of different faiths and no faith.”

2. The petition was started on 22 May by Iraj Irfan. The petition is open for signatures until 22 June and to date, has received over 200 signatures.
3. Acts of collective worship must be broadly Christian in ethos, as set out in Welsh Office circular 10/94, but those leading acts of collective worship should be sensitive to the views and beliefs of others. Times of prayer must be left open-ended so learners are afforded the opportunity to pray in their own way, to reflect on events in their life or to consider moral issues.
4. Mike Hedges AM also wrote to you recently about another petition which calls for “... *the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to pass a law that removes the obligation on schools to hold acts of religious worship.*” The petition is open for signatures until 18 June and to date, has received over 1,200 signatures. You responded to Mike Hedges AM on 2 May, setting out the current position of collective worship in Wales.
5. A draft reply is attached for your consideration, which again sets out the current position.