



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Circular 1/2005

PROVISION OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

Dear Colleague

Introduction

1. This circular describes and explains the Scottish Executive's policy on the provision of religious observance in Scottish schools and sets out action for local authorities in planning the provision of religious observance. The Circular replaces the arrangements for religious observance set out in Circular 6/91 and applies to all primary and secondary schools, including special schools. The policy on religious education set out in Circular 6/91 remains in force meantime.

2. Scotland is a society with a longstanding Christian tradition. The most recent census showed that Christianity remains the main religious influence in Scotland. 67% of the Scottish population reported having a religion. 65% reported being members of the Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church or other Christian churches. However, Scotland has for many generations also had other faith and belief traditions, never more so than at present as Scotland increasingly becomes a place for many cultures and beliefs. This trend is set to continue as Scotland sets out to attract people from other communities as part of Scottish Executive policy. We can expect Scotland to become increasingly diverse in the range of faith and belief traditions represented. Religious observance needs to be developed in a way which reflects and understands this diversity. It should be sensitive to our traditions and origins and should seek to reflect these but it must equally be sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith or non-faith perspective.

3. The 2004 report of the Religious Observance Review Group made a number of recommendations about development of religious observance in schools (the full report is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/rorg-00.asp). This circular responds to

the recommendation that the Scottish Executive Education Department should review the circular on religious observance. In preparing this guidance, account has been taken of the current legislation as contained in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the special note contained in the HMIE report *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools: Religious and Moral Education 1995-2000*.

Religious Education

4. Scottish Executive policy on religious education, as set out in Circular 6/91, is supported by the 5-14 National Guidelines on religious and moral education. The guidelines will be assessed against the principles and purposes of *A Curriculum for Excellence* during the second stage of the curriculum review. The importance of religious education for all school children will be emphasised in the review. When the review of the existing guidelines has been completed, we will update the religious education element of Circular 6/91 and the national guidelines.

Response to the Religious Observance Review Group Report

5. The recommendations of the Religious Observance Review Group outline sensitive and tactful solutions which will allow schools to provide religious observance which is an inclusive, valuable and meaningful experience for all. Scottish Ministers see religious observance as an important educational experience for children and young people at all stages of primary and secondary school. In accepting the Group's recommendations, Ministers believe that future actions can build on Scotland's strong Christian traditions without compromising them, and also promote the understanding and acceptance of other faiths and beliefs.

Definition of religious observance

6. Ministers accept the definition of and aims of religious observance proposed by the Religious Observance Review Group:

- *community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.*

Approach

7. Each individual within a school community should be enabled to develop as a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor. Religious observance should have an important part to play in this development. It should also provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on, and develop, a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual and their contribution to the school and wider communities.

8. In recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage, schools are encouraged to use the rich resources of this tradition when planning religious observance. Many school communities contain pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment. This should be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith stances.

9. At present school assemblies are the most common vehicle for delivering religious observance. There should be a clear distinction between assemblies devised for the purpose of religious observance and assemblies for other purposes such as celebrating success. The precise form of religious observance will be determined by each school's policy within the local authority's framework, but these might include opportunities for class, year, stage or whole school observance as well as involvement by pupils and others, including school chaplains, in planning and presentation.

10. Materials and training events will be provided to support schools and authorities.

Frequency of religious observance

11. Religious observance needs to take place sufficiently frequently to have an impact on the spiritual development of the school community. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance.

12. The Review Group acknowledged the need to balance the frequency which would make a positive impact on young people with the need to ensure that the experiences are valuable and inclusive. This will require careful planning by schools. The group concluded that every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year, in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community, and preferably with greater frequency. We recognise that many primary schools value weekly religious observance as part of their regular assembly programme and will wish to continue with this. The school community should be involved in making decisions about frequency.

Parental Right to withdraw

13. There is a statutory provision for parents to withdraw children from participation in religious observance. This right should always be made known to parents and their wishes respected. Parents should be provided with sufficient information on which to base a decision.

14. Scottish Ministers consider that religious observance complements religious education and is an important contribution to pupils' development. It should also have a role in promoting the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. Schools are therefore encouraged to inform parents of this without applying pressure to change their minds.

15. Where a child is withdrawn from religious observance, schools should make suitable arrangements for the child to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity. In no circumstances should a child be disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from religious observance.

Chaplains

16. Scottish Ministers value the important and varied contributions that chaplains and other faith group leaders make to the life of the school, for example in their involvement in religious observance, acts of worship, religious and moral education and a broader pastoral role. Headteachers are encouraged to engage in full discussion with chaplains in planning and implementation of religious observance. In supporting religious observance, chaplains'

own religious stances should be respected and they should not be asked, or expected, to compromise their religious beliefs.

Worship in schools

17. The Religious Observance Review Group considered the relationship between organised acts of worship and religious observance. They concluded with the following statement:

Where the school, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community's faith in the "focus of worship", may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the review group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, groups, chaplains and other religious leaders.

Ministers endorse this approach as complementary to schools' policy on religious observance and would ask schools to consider this statement when planning for religious observance.

18. Members of the school community, including pupils, parents and representatives of faith groups and communities, may wish to have opportunities for organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum of the school. Ministers would encourage headteachers to consider these requests positively and make suitable arrangements if appropriate personnel and accommodation can be provided.

Facilities

19. Consideration should be given to providing appropriate facilities in schools for acts of religious observance and worship. Locations need to be considered in the light of the size and diversity of participating groups. Locations for religious observance and worship should be considered in the planning and design of new and refurbished school buildings, to provide facilities which meet school and community needs.

Support

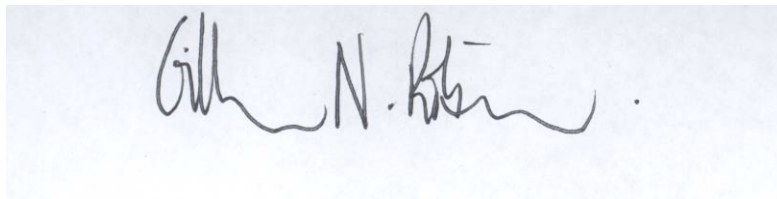
20. We recognise that schools will need support to enable them to action these revised arrangements. The Scottish Executive Education Department has therefore commissioned Learning and Teaching Scotland to develop, in collaboration with faith groups, the following support materials and resources for schools:

- guidance and exemplar materials to support schools in developing high quality activities for religious observance;
- guidance and exemplar materials on the role of chaplaincy teams; and
- self-evaluation tools for schools to assist them in evaluating the quality of religious observance provided for pupils.

Training events will be organised by Learning and Teaching Scotland to provide support on the use of these materials.

Conclusion

21. Local authorities and schools are invited to:
 - work with the school community to plan the content, frequency, and location of religious observance, in line with this Circular and the Review Group report;
 - review their policies on religious observance, and develop practice in line with this Circular and the Review Group report; and
 - introduce necessary changes into planning processes as soon as possible.
22. Please send a copy of this circular to the Headteacher of each school in your area.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Gill N. Robinson" in a cursive style.

DR GILL ROBINSON
Qualifications, Assessment and Curriculum Division