



together

Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights



Humanist
Society
Scotland

For an ethical future

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh

By Email

12 August 2024

Dear Jenny Gilruth MSP,

The right to opt out of religious observance at school

As organisations working to uphold the rights of children and young people in Scotland, we have long called for an end to compulsory religious worship in state schools. Newly published census figures show that the school-age population is now majority (60%) non-religious for the first time, and more diverse in terms of faith and belief than ever before. As schools across Scotland return from summer break, *we ask you again to reform current guidance so that pupils have a choice to opt out of religious observance at school.*

While we recognise that parents currently have the right to withdraw their children from religious observance, no equivalent right is afforded to pupils irrespective of their age or competency. To be clear - a parent opt-out does not go far enough in upholding childrens' human right to freedom of religion or belief.

In addition to **Together (the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)** recommending a pupil-opt out from religious observance in five of the last six [State of Children's Rights in Scotland reports](#), our position is shared by a number of key stakeholders.

The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child** has itself repeatedly called for the repeal of compulsory collective worship in state-funded schools in Scotland. In its recommendations, it is explicit that children must be allowed to independently exercise their right to opt out of religious observance at school.

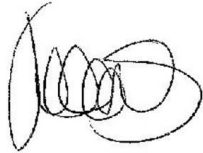
And in 2020, the **Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland** recommended that the Scottish Government conduct a review of religious observance. This review would consider whether it should be offered at all in non-denominational schools, or as an exclusively opt-in activity.

Our members and supporters have grown increasingly concerned at the lack of progress from Scottish Ministers on this issue (we refer you to the written question [S6W-27831](#) answered on 28 May 2024). This is despite a broad consensus in favour of a pupil opt-out, the confirmation of a more secular and diverse school-age population, and the recent

commencement of the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act which commits public authorities to embed childrens' rights in everything they do.

We therefore seek an urgent assurance from you that the Scottish Government intends to address this incompatibility with the UNCRC and ensure childrens' views, beliefs and choices are fully respected.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Juliet Harris', with a stylized, cursive script.

Juliet Harris
Director, Together
(Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Fraser Sutherland', with a stylized, cursive script.

Fraser Sutherland
Chief Executive
Humanist Society Scotland