

PE2129/A: Standardise criteria and consultations for assessing demand for denominational schools

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 20 December 2024

Thank you for writing to the Scottish Government, seeking its view of PE2129. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require education authorities to adopt a uniform set of criteria and a standard consultation process for assessing community demand for denominational schools.

I would like to make clear from the outset the Scottish Government's strong and continuing support for Catholic education in Scotland and the important role Catholic schools plays in their local communities and wider Scottish society.

Decisions regarding the establishment, closure, or alteration of schools, are the responsibility of local authorities. This reflects their statutory duty to manage the school estate and provide education tailored to the specific needs and contexts of their communities.

Existing legislation takes into account the needs of communities who wish to establish a denominational school. Under Section 17 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities may establish a denominational school for any denomination or faith if they are satisfied that such a school is required, either in response to representations made to them by any church or denominational body acting on behalf of parents, or on their own initiative.

In addition, the statutory consultation process under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 for significant changes to the school estate. The legislation aims to ensure that local authorities consult widely with communities when making decisions about school provision, including establishing new denominational schools, and that there is transparency and public involvement in that process.

Therefore, our view is that the current framework for decision making around the establishment of denominational schools is sufficient. We encourage local authorities to engage meaningfully with their communities, uphold transparency, and ensure fairness in decision-making processes.

I hope the Committee finds this letter helpful in setting out the Scottish Government's position on assessing community demand for denominational schools.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH

