

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

Petitioner written submission, 16 January 2025

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Secretary for her letter dated 20 December 2024 regarding Petition PE2129. I appreciate the Scottish Government's position on denominational schooling and the references to current legislation. However, in light of the Committee's invitation to provide *new or clarifying information*, I would like to submit the following points:

1. Ongoing Inconsistency Across Local Authorities

Despite the legal framework, local authorities vary greatly in how they interpret and apply the Education (Scotland) Acts of 1918 and 1980. In areas such as Aberdeen, communities are still encountering significant barriers to establishing new Catholic secondary schools, compared to relatively smoother processes elsewhere (e.g. Glasgow or Edinburgh).

2. Impact of the Recent School Infrastructure Investment

Scotland's multi-billion-pound commitment to school infrastructure—reportedly including up to £2 billion under the Learning Estate Investment Programme—represents a vital opportunity to *rectify such regional disparities*. If harnessed correctly, these funds could support councils whose budgets would otherwise preclude the creation or expansion of denominational schools, ensuring that legitimate community demand does not go unmet.

3. Proposed Amendments to Strengthen the 2010 Act

In addition to endorsing a *uniform consultation and assessment framework* for denominational schools, I continue to recommend targeted amendments to the Education (Scotland) Acts of 1918 and 1980. These would:

- **Standardise Criteria** for evaluating demand, aligning Section 17 of the 1980 Act with the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.
- **Introduce a Dedicated Fund** for denominational school proposals, so areas with limited finances are not disadvantaged.
- **Provide Clear National Guidance**, minimising local biases and holding all authorities equally accountable.

By addressing the above, Scotland can reinforce its commitment to **fairness, inclusivity, and equal opportunity** in education—ensuring that each local authority's approach to denominational schools is both transparent and consistent.

Thank you for your continued attention to this matter. I remain hopeful that, with further review and potential legislative refinement, every Scottish community—regardless of location—will have equitable access to denominational schooling where demand exists.