

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on [PE2129](#): Standardise criteria and consultations for assessing demand for denominational schools, lodged by Elizabeth Spencer

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to:

“require education authorities to adopt a uniform set of criteria and a standard consultation for assessing community demand for denominational schools.”

Denominational schools

Denominational schools in Scotland are run by the local authority. They differ from non-denominational schools in that they reflect the ethos of a particular religion. Most, but not all, denominational schools in Scotland are Roman Catholic.

Not all local authorities have denominational schools. Some local authorities have denominational primary schools but do not have a standalone denominational secondary school.

Denominational schools have played a key role in the development of state education in Scotland. As of 2023, around 15% of state schools are denominational schools and around 18% of pupils are educated in denominational schools.

Education authorities have a duty to secure the provision of adequate and efficient education (section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980). In doing so the education authority "shall have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of suitable instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents." (section 28 of the 1980 Act).

Section 21 of the 1980 Act sets out some of the specific rights and duties in relation to denominational schools. For example, the local authority "shall appoint as supervisor of religious instruction, without remuneration, a person approved as regards religious belief and character as aforesaid, and the supervisor so appointed shall report to the education authority as to the

efficiency of the religious instruction given in such school, and shall be entitled to enter the school at all times set apart for religious instruction or observance.” There is also [an approval process](#) to teach in denominational schools.

Section 17 of the 1980 Act provides a power for education authorities to establish a denominational school, having regard to the religious belief of parents in the education authority’s area.

A proposal by an education authority to establish any school falls under a “relevant proposal” under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The 2010 Act provides for statutory consultation process on a range of relevant proposals to do with changes to the school estate and catchments.

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Researcher

03/1/2025

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