

## Secularists demand end to religion on school boards

Posted by Ernhw Ltd - 14 Oct 2013 11:29

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Courtesy Scotsman

Churches hold the balance of power in nearly two thirds of council education committees.

by CRAIG BROWN

“UNDEMOCRATIC, unelected, unscientific and self-serving” church leaders should not have the legal right to make decisions on school education, according to cross-party politicians and secular groups.

Churches hold the balance of power in nearly two thirds of council education committees due to legislation which compels councils to appoint three religious representatives, the secular coalition said.

The Edinburgh Secular Society (ESS) has lodged a petition to repeal the law, backed by The National Secular Society, Humanist Society Scotland and University of Edinburgh Humanist Society with the support of Green MSP Patrick Harvie and SNP councillor Sandy Howat.

Mr Harvie is particularly concerned about the promotion of creationism in schools, while Mr Howat said the churches’ right to unelected representation on boards is “undemocratic and untenable”.

But Father Tom Boyle, assistant general secretary of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland for the Catholic Church, who also sits on East Renfrewshire’s education committee, dismissed the petition as an attempt to “remove any influence of religion from public life”.

The ESS petition calls for a repeal of section 124 of the Local Government Act, which ensures religious representation on boards, following recent census results which show that nearly half of Scots profess no religious beliefs.

Colin Emerson, ESS vice-chair, said: “To afford a particular section of society a privileged position within the decision making process based solely on their particular and personal religious beliefs is profoundly and inherently undemocratic, unfair and discriminatory.”

Mr Harvie, MSP for Glasgow, said: "I'm particularly concerned at the involvement of people who would promote utterly unscientific notions like creationism, pushing this absurd ideology at children is the very opposite of education."

Mr Howat, an elected member of Edinburgh Council's education, children and families committee, said: "Unelected, unaccountable and I would suggest untenable.

"Undemocratic influence over public education is fundamentally at odds with the principles of respect, equality and shared freedoms.

"All contributions to committee deliberations should be welcomed, yet continued undemocratic privilege of the few over the many is an outdated tradition we should remove. As we look to create a fairer Scotland, we need to ask ourselves what this 'privilege' says about our values ."

However Fr Boyle said: "This betrays their ignorance of schools in Scotland, which had their origins in the churches before they were transferred into the state system, and that's why we take an interest in them, because they belonged to us.

"As well as that, the Catholic Church is one of the largest educators in the world, so we have a certain expertise.

"It's the ongoing campaign to remove any influence of religion from public life in our country."

A Church of Scotland spokesperson said: "The somewhat hysterical language used by the secularist groups suggests aggression to cover for a weak argument.

"The contribution of religious representatives in being independent, rooted in communities and often with a great deal of experience in education, is greatly valued by councils across the country.

"And this attack on their personal integrity by the secularists is extraordinary and really quite sad."

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## **Re: Secularists demand end to religion on school boards**

Posted by Gordon McCaskill - 17 Oct 2013 06:29

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Can't say I agree with this. Having religious reps on Education Committees means you can argue with them face to face and I have as posters on this site will know very well.

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## **Re: Secularists demand end to religion on school boards**

Posted by lasercow - 17 Oct 2013 07:58

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They represent very small parts of the community. They should not have a vote or any say in matters. Look at how legislators have to pussyfoot around to allow them to discriminate against people, they should not be allowed a direct vote.

Unless I can get on as a Flying Spaghetti Monster representative - I bet with a clever social marketing campaign I could achieve a local congregation bigger than that represented by all local churches/sects/cults.

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## **Re: Secularists demand end to religion on school boards**

Posted by Concerned ERC Parent - 17 Oct 2013 10:13

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Can only speak for the RC side. As has been well covered, a lot of time, work, energy goes into preparation for the sacraments and RE by parents, teachers, pupils, church etc. There will still be a big following for this.

But I'd take the lot away from local authority control and take the politics out of it.

But let's say we change St Ninian's from RC to a school for pupils that eat spaghetti. Maybe there is more demand for places due to league table and more pupils love spaghetti. The school cannot be extended so the catchment area must be reduced. Are the pupils that love spaghetti and suddenly removed from the catchment area discriminated against? Or maybe they need another spaghetti school.

Even if we subtract RC or spaghetti there will be a problem with some schools here due to demand. Maybe it's important or just fair to look at why the school was built in the first place and if demand is still high.

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## Re: Secularists demand end to religion on school boards

Posted by lasercow - 17 Oct 2013 10:38

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As has been well covered, a lot of time, work, energy goes into preparation for the sacraments and RE by parents, teachers, pupils, church etc. There will still be a big following for this.

For all the heathens and Muslims too? 🙄

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## Re: Secularists demand end to religion on school boards

Posted by Concerned ERC Parent - 17 Oct 2013 10:43

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### **lasercow wrote:**

They represent very small parts of the community. They should not have a vote or any say in matters. Look at how legislators have to pussyfoot around to allow them to discriminate against people, they should not be allowed a direct vote.

For all the heathens and Muslims too?

Yes they will be aware of the preparation as there is no discrimination as the schools are open to everyone when they are not full. When they are full I'm not sure who gets discriminated against.

So i'm sure they are well aware of the preparation and work that goes into it. 😊

According to the council there are plenty of places going in the local RC denominational school so maybe demand is not as high as it was a couple of years ago. I wonder why that is? Surely they haven't made a mistake?

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