

# Petition to remove religious observance from schools presented to City of Edinburgh Council

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The National Secular Society has supported one of its members, Veronica Wikman, in presenting a petition to City of Edinburgh Council to remove Religious Observance from the city's non-denominational schools.

NSS Council member Professor Norman Bonney and NSS Scottish representative Alistair McBay supported Ms Wikman, whose petition was backed by the NSS affiliated [Edinburgh Secular Society](#) (ESS), which has enjoyed extensive publicity as a result of its campaign.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, schools have a statutory requirement to offer religious education and religious observance. However, under [Section 8 of the Act](#), Local Authorities in Scotland are empowered to abolish RO, subject to a resolution in favour of discontinuance being approved by a majority of local voters.

Ms Wikman's [petition](#) called for a local vote on a proposal to discontinue religious observance in non-denominational schools in the city.

The Council also accepted a rival petition to retain Religious Observance, in effect a petition to the Council to do nothing. The rival petitioners chose not to appear on the day to present their case, but Church of Scotland minister and former leader of the Council Reverend Ewan Aitken did make a 'deputation' on behalf of the Kirk. Rev Aitken insisted that the Church did not want to indoctrinate children and suggested RO should be preserved in the best interests of children and their 'spiritual development'.

Secularists in Scotland have expressed concern that much of the religious observance in non-denominational schools is being facilitated by external evangelical groups such as [Scripture Union](#) and [Prayer Spaces in Schools](#).

The ESS backed petition attracted 896 valid signatures. The Church of Scotland backed counter 'do nothing' petition attracted 1522 signatures, but had a proportionately higher number of invalid and disqualified signatures.

The Petitions Committee decided to refer the petitions on to the Education Committee.

Alistair McBay, NSS representative for Scotland said: "It is perhaps no surprise that the vested religious interests mobilised behind their counter petition, but it was clearly a surprise to some councillors present that there was such a high level of objection to RO in schools.

"It is something of a victory for the ESS for the petition to have passed this stage, and we are particularly pleased that some councillors expressed their concern about the infiltration into schools by religious groups with questionable positions on evolution, science and human sexuality. The Council's Head of Schools and Community Services undertook to research exactly what was

happening in the city's schools under the heading of RO. Naturally both the NSS and ESS will be making our own research available to the Council."

The full presentation to the Petitions Committee can be [viewed online](#).

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