

# Welsh AMs to probe whether collective worship is compliant with human rights law

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Two Welsh school students who launched a petition demanding the removal of the obligation on state schools to hold acts of worship have won support from a committee of AMs.

The Welsh Assembly petitions committee has undertaken to write to the Education Secretary asking her to look at whether the legal requirement on mainstream schools to hold collective acts of worship is compatible with human rights laws.

The students, Rhiannon Shipton and Lily McAllister-Sutton, [launched a petition](#) calling on Welsh Assembly Members to end the obligation on schools to hold collective worship after becoming increasingly frustrated by being forced to say prayers against their will.

The pair said they were "delighted" that the petition was to be acted upon.

Rhiannon Shipton, 15, told the NSS: "Members of the Committee understand that this is a human rights issue. No-one should be forced to pray. Lily and I are very grateful to everyone who has supported our petition and hope it will lead to real change."

Committee member Neil McEvoy said: "It is really great to see young people engage in politics and taking an interest today in the public gallery. I think it is right to progress this petition."

Committee chairman David Rowlands said: "[We will] write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education to ask whether the Welsh Government will consider reviewing the current law and guidelines surrounding collective worship and if any consideration has been given to the compatibility of the current requirements with human right law as the first question."

The move was also welcomed by the National Secular Society, which has long campaigned for the legal requirement on schools in England and Wales to hold a daily act of collective worship to be abolished.

In 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Education in Wales, Kirsty Williams, told the NSS that a review of collective worship in Wales could be undertaken once the ongoing curriculum reform has been completed.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns director, said "The curriculum reforms currently being undertaken in Wales provide the ideal context to rethink this hopelessly anachronistic imposition on schools. The Welsh government should seize this opportunity to ensure that all aspects of the school day, including assemblies, are respectful and inclusive of all pupils. That means an end to compulsory worship."

Last year, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child [called on the UK to abolish compulsory worship](#) in schools and ensure students are given the independent right of withdrawal from any worship that does take place.

In 2015 senior academics warned of "[significant concerns](#)" about the imposition of collective worship in non-religious schools – arguing that it may violate the right to freedom of religion and

belief.

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