

The Report of the

# Religious Observance

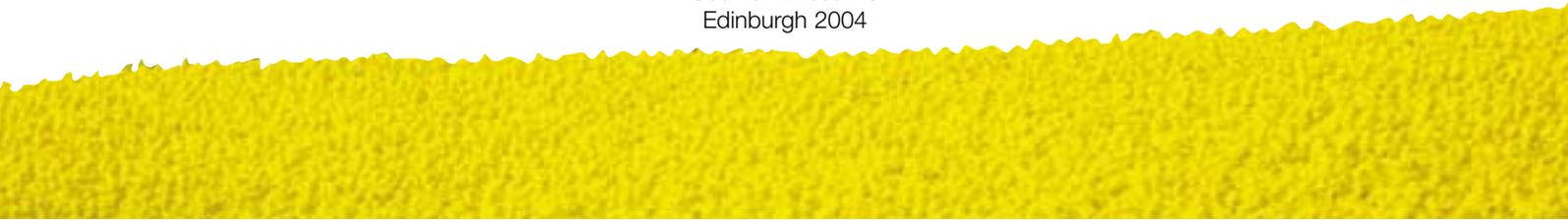
Review Group



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

The Report of the  
**Religious Observance**  
Review Group

Scottish Executive  
Edinburgh 2004



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iv foreword

1 introduction

- 1 Why a review group?

2 the context

- 3 Legislation
- 4 Provision of religious education and religious observance in primary and secondary schools (SOED Circular 6/91)
- 5 Educational developments

6 the consultative process

- 7 Review group meetings
- 8 Consultation paper
- 8 Website and mailbox
- 8 Focus group meetings
- 9 Questionnaire
- 9 How the review group used the consultation feedback

10 issues

- 12 The definition and aims of religious observance
- 12 The meaning of spiritual development in a school context
- 14 The extent to which there are shared values within our society
- 15 The appropriateness of the term 'religious observance'
- 17 The relationship between religious observance and religious and moral education
- 18 The frequency and quality of religious observance
- 19 Locations for religious observance
- 19 The role of chaplains in religious observance and organised acts of worship
- 21 Exemplar material and training
- 21 Diversity and flexibility of approach

22 religious observance in the twenty-first century

- 23 Conclusion
- 25 Recommendations

27

- 27 Appendix 1: Publications consulted
- 28 Appendix 2: Consultation paper
- 31 Appendix 3: Membership

# foreword



When I met with the members of the review group for the first time to discuss our remit it was the start of a journey that was difficult and challenging but at the same time exciting and rewarding. We were a group of people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and I am pleased to say that very quickly an extremely positive group dynamic developed.

Members of the group are to be congratulated for their commitment that has gone well beyond what might have been expected of them. Very much at the forefront of the group's thinking was the knowledge that whatever was recommended would have to be delivered by schools.

I believe our recommendations are realistic and achievable.

Ours was not an easy task as religion is a topic that always provokes a variety of often very emotive responses and views. These range across a wide spectrum of opinion from those who wish no religious observance at all in schools to those who wish to see much more.

Very early in our deliberations we recognised the importance of listening to and considering all views. This has been a principle to which we have adhered throughout the consultation process and during our consideration of the outcomes of that process. The consultation exercise conducted by the group has been extensive and members of the group spent many hours reading all the consultation responses and deliberating on the views expressed. These responses were also analysed and reported on by consultants from The Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE).

This report reflects a vision for religious observance in schools that I hope will have the support of schools and the wider communities who can and do contribute to religious observance. We have tried to make the report inclusive, reflecting Scottish society as it is today. I am sure it will promote much discussion and dialogue among those with an interest in this subject.

It is my hope that this review of religious observance will be seen by most as a positive way forward that will assist schools to promote the spiritual development of our young people. Religious observance as defined in this report has an important place in our education system and I commend the report and its recommendations to the Minister.



**Anne Wilson**

Chair, Religious Observance Review Group  
Director of Education, Dundee City Council

# one: introduction

Why a review group?

The HMIE report, *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools: Religious and Moral Education 1995-2000*, though concerned primarily with religious and moral education, contained a special note on religious observance. The note identified HM Inspectors' concerns that many non-denominational secondary schools were failing to provide time for religious observance as outlined in the guidance issued in *Provision of religious education and religious observance in primary and secondary schools*, SOED Circular 6/91.



HM Inspectors felt that primary schools were generally following the guidance set out in SOED Circular 6/91. In the case of non-denominational secondary schools, HM Inspectors did not believe that schools were being deliberately negligent, rather that head teachers were finding difficulty in taking account of the guidance contained in the Circular and of the intentions of legislation dating back to 1872, in ways which were meaningful in the social, cultural and educational context of today. In fact the Foreword to the HMIE report raised the question of the continuing appropriateness of current advice on religious observance.

Following the publication of the HMIE report, the then Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, Jack McConnell, established a group to review the provision of religious observance in all schools, to consider the current guidance on arrangements for religious observance and to make recommendations for the future.

Mr McConnell asked Anne Wilson, Director of Education at Dundee City Council, to chair the review group which was made up of representatives from education and religious organisations and parent groups. The following remit was agreed:

*'To review current guidance on arrangements for religious observance in schools taking account of the views of interested bodies and individuals including religious organisations, teachers, parents and pupils; to make recommendations to Ministers on any changes which are required to ensure that revised guidance to schools is relevant and appropriate for pupils, that it fulfils the requirements of the 1980 Act and also provides practical advice on religious observance.'*

The remit states very clearly that the review should take account of the views of interested bodies and individuals. The review group, conscious of the range of views on the subject of religious observance and the strength of feeling which the subject can engender, adopted procedures to ensure that the consultation process was as wide and thorough as possible. These procedures are outlined in the section on the consultative process.

## two: the context





## Legislation

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which repeats the legislation of previous acts, education authorities have a statutory requirement to provide religious observance and religious education in Scottish schools. This legislation originally dates from 1872 when the social, cultural and educational context was very different from today.

# two: the context

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

The relevant sections of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 are as follows:

**Section 8 (1)** *Whereas it has been the custom in the public schools of Scotland for religious observance to be practised and for instruction in religion to be given to pupils whose parents did not object to such observance or instruction, but with liberty to parents, without forfeiting any of the other advantages of the schools, to elect that their children should not take part in such observance or receive such instruction, be it enacted that education authorities shall be at liberty to continue the said custom...'*

**Section 8 (2)** *It shall not be lawful for an education authority to discontinue religious observance or the provision of instruction in religion in terms of subsection (1) above, unless and until a resolution in favour of such discontinuance duly passed by the authority has been submitted to a poll of the local government electors for the education area taken for the purpose, and has been approved by a majority of electors voting thereat.'*

## Guidance – SOED Circular 6/91

### *Provision of religious education and religious observance in primary and secondary schools*

The Scottish Office Education Department issued guidance to local authorities and schools in 1991 on the *Provision of religious education and religious observance in primary and secondary schools* (SOED Circular 6/91). The Circular expressed the view that religious observance was a valid and important educational experience which made *'an important contribution to pupils' spiritual development'*. It recognised that it could also *'have a subsidiary role in promoting the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a feeling of corporate identity.'* It stated that in non-denominational schools religious observance should be of a *'broadly Christian character'*.

The Circular also provided advice on the amount of time which should be allocated to religious observance. It stated that all primary pupils *'should take part in religious observance not less than once a week'* and that all secondary pupils *'should take part in religious observance at least once a month and preferably with greater frequency.'*

Local authorities were asked to review their policies on religious observance to ensure they were in line with the Circular.

## Educational developments

The education system in Scotland has gone through significant developments since the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and SOED Circular 6/91. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 encapsulates the current emphasis in Scottish education which is to ensure that *'education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.'*

This reflects the view that education is more than gaining knowledge, more than learning skills. It is about realising and meeting personal potential, both intellectually and emotionally. It is about nurturing and developing the whole person, one who can make a positive contribution to the society in which he or she lives.

The Scottish Parliament, in pursuing this view of education, has defined National Priorities in Education. These National Priorities set the framework within which schools and education authorities are to plan education for their pupils.

The National Priorities have been identified as: Achievement and Attainment; Framework for Learning; Inclusion and Equality; Values and Citizenship; and Learning for Life.

The National Priorities are intended to support the development and education of the whole person, focusing on quality of experiences and opportunity as much as on attainment and achievement.

This is very much in line with the drive towards a greater focus on inclusion and flexibility in education policy as highlighted in *Educating For Excellence, The Executive's Response to the National Debate*, in which the Ministerial Foreword outlines the desire for *'Scottish Education to realise the potential of every child in every community'* and the intention to *'create more local flexibility and choice'*.

A landscape photograph showing a field in the foreground with a fence made of wooden posts and a white rope. In the middle ground, there are several trees and utility poles with power lines. The background features a range of hills or mountains under a hazy, purple-tinged sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

three: the consultative process



## Review group meetings

The members of the review group represented a considerable range of educational experiences and perspectives and these provided a valuable resource in its deliberations. Members were encouraged to maintain a dialogue during the

At its first meeting, the review group was presented with correspondence from individuals and organisations with an interest in the review, a reflection of the interest which the review had generated.

Discussion was informed by insights from key national reports which have explored the issue of religious observance over the last forty years. These offered an invaluable historical perspective. The reports are listed in Appendix 1.

consultation period with the various groups and organisations with which they were involved.

# three: the consultative process

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

## Consultation paper

The development of a consultation paper was a very useful exercise for crystallising the views of the group and providing a focus for discussion and debate. The paper was also used as the foundation for a questionnaire on which the more formal consultation process was based.

## Website and mailbox

The review group developed a dedicated website, hosted and maintained by Learning and Teaching Scotland, to provide information on the background to the review, the review group's progress and the consultation procedures which had been developed. The website also contained an electronic version of the questionnaire developed by the group.

A dedicated mailbox, which offered another way of submitting views to the group, was also set up.

Around 3,500 visits had been made to the website between November 2002 and September 2003.

## Focus group meetings

Focus group meetings were held in a range of venues which reflected different aspects of Scotland's cultural landscape. The meetings provided a very useful and informative insight into a range of perspectives and experiences.

Meetings were held in Dundee, Glasgow, Inverness, Edinburgh and Dumfries. These were well attended by people from surrounding areas. The review group is grateful to the local education departments and religious organisations who helped to promote and co-ordinate these events. Teachers, pupils, parents, chaplains and representatives from religious and humanist organisations were among those who attended the meetings and shared their insights and experiences with the review group. Around 400 people attended these meetings.

Reports of the meetings were discussed by the review group and fed into the formal consultation process.

## Questionnaire

The Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) was commissioned to work with the review group on the development and distribution of a questionnaire and to manage the consultation exercise. The questionnaire was issued to 153 organisations and was also available on the website.

Particular care was taken to elicit as wide a range of perspectives as possible in the consultation process. Over 1600 responses to the questionnaire were received, a reflection of the interest in the area of religious observance. This provided a wide range of views on the issues raised by the consultation paper. In addition to the professional analysis carried out by SCRE, contained in its consultation report, the review group dedicated a meeting to the scrutiny of the responses.

## How the review group used the consultation feedback

The outcomes of the consultation were discussed in great detail and analysed by the group. The issues raised and the review group's responses are set out in the following section.



four: issues



This section identifies key issues raised during the consultation process and explores these within the context of the statutory requirements and the nature of contemporary society.

The key issues raised during consultation were:

- the definition and aims of religious observance
- the meaning of spiritual development in a school context
- the extent to which there are shared values within our society
- the appropriateness of the term 'religious observance'
- the relationship between religious observance and religious and moral education
- the frequency and quality of religious observance
- locations for religious observance
- the role of chaplains in religious observance and organised acts of worship
- exemplar material and training
- diversity and flexibility of approach

# four: issues

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

## The definition and aims of religious observance

Issues were raised relating to the clarification of the meaning of the terms '*spiritual development*' and '*shared values*' and these terms are explored below. Issues were also raised relating to the role of schools in relation to Christianity and these are explored in the consultation report. There was, however, broad agreement with the review group's definition and aims of religious observance.

The consultation paper defines the term for use in schools in Scotland as:

*'community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.'*

The aims of religious observance are defined as:

*'to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.'*

## The meaning of spiritual development in a school context

The consultation process revealed the need to clarify the meaning of 'spiritual development' as used in the consultation paper. The consultation paper states that spiritual development '*includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one's dignity as a person*'.

The idea of spiritual development led the group to look at the concept of spirituality. The concept of spirituality has its origin in religion and is still popularly identified as a religious concept used by members of religious traditions. Its use, however, is not limited to members of religious traditions. It is also used by many outwith formal religion to describe key aspects of their experience. In fact, in spite of the move away from involvement with formal religion in Scottish society, there is evidence of a growing interest in the spiritual dimension.

Those who belong to a faith community believe that the human spirit is created by God and can only be fully developed through a relationship with God. Others believe that the human spirit can be understood and developed without any reference to a divinity. Most would agree that the spiritual dimension comes from what makes us human, it is a reflection of our deepest humanity. The spiritual dimension is seen and expressed in many ways such as:

- Sensing mystery:** experiences of awe, wonder and mystery about the natural world, human achievement and for some a divinity
- Sensing values:** attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters
- Sensing meaningfulness:** the ability to make connections or to see potential patterns in one's life which give it meaning
- Sensing a changed quality in awareness:** the feeling of being 'at one' with nature, oneself and others
- Sensing 'otherness':** the sentiment that humans are more than their physical elements
- Sensing challenge:** being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death.

Within the educational context, *Spiritual and Moral Development*, National Curriculum Council, Discussion Document, makes the following statement:

*'The term "spiritual" applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to every one and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs... The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition... it has to do with the unique search for human identity...'*

# four: issues

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

In the setting of the school, whether this be a denominational school where the focus will be very much aimed at the fostering of religious life based on the belief of the divine origin of the human spirit, or a non-denominational school faced with a broader cross-section of religious and other viewpoints, the review group would maintain that religious observance can play an important role in the spiritual development of all within the school community.

An analysis of the policy statements of local authorities on religious observance reveals a set of concerns similar to those identified as belonging to the spiritual dimension suggesting that these are already at the heart of good practice in religious observance.

## The extent to which there are shared values within our society

The second element within the definition is the reference to the '*shared values*' within the school community. The consultation process raised the issue of the extent to which there are shared values within school communities.

Whilst *Religious and Moral Education 5-14 National Guidelines* identifies '*honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and concern for others*' as common shared values in our society, several respondents highlighted the fact that different communities also hold values particular to their own tradition. The review group believes that these values should be acknowledged, the right of people to hold them respected and that pupils should be encouraged to reflect on these values and the life stances which they reflect.

Within the context of a school community, shared values give a sense of belonging and should underpin all aspects of its life. The review group agrees with the view expressed during the consultation that the process of understanding and developing the shared values should involve pupils, staff, parents, churches, other faith communities and the wider community in which the school is set. Participation in the process is an essential element in terms of ownership of the agreed values.

### The appropriateness of the term 'religious observance'

In the non-denominational sector there are two aspects in relation to the appropriateness of the term religious observance. First, some concern was expressed as to whether what was being defined in this report was in fact religious observance. The second aspect relates to misgivings about the term '*religious observance*' within the contemporary educational context.

Central to the first of these aspects is the perceived relationship between religious observance and worship. The contentious nature of this relationship was articulated, though not resolved, in *Moral and Religious Education in Scottish Schools*. Subsequent reports – *Bulletin 1: A Curricular Approach to Religious Education; Religious Observance in Primary and Secondary Schools, An Interim Report by HM Inspectors of Schools; and Report of SCOSDE – SSB8, Religious Observance in Primary and Secondary Schools* – reiterate but do not resolve the issue.

The problem was highlighted in the 1990s by the publication of two documents giving different interpretations of the relationship between religious observance and worship. SOED Circular 6/91 identifies religious observance as being '*occasions set aside for different forms of worship*'. *Religious and Moral Education 5-14 National Guidelines* refers to religious observance as being '*something akin to worship*'. These national reports reflect the popular perception that religious observance is very closely related to, if not synonymous with, worship.

In considering this relationship the consultation paper attempted to distinguish between an organised act of worship and religious observance. Worship is a free response of an individual and community to what is considered worthy of worship. This response involves three elements: belief in the reality of the focus of worship, desire to offer worship to the focus of worship and the commitment to life stances related to the focus of worship. An organised act of worship is based on the assumption that those present share these elements. Religious observance does not assume these elements.

# four: issues

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

All pupils and staff participating in religious observance within the context of a school assembly will share the same stimulus drawn from a range of sources such as story, music, art, drama, poetry, films or television. Religious traditions will provide a rich resource. Responses to the stimulus may, however, take a range of forms, one of which for some members of the school community may be worship. This acknowledges the diversity of beliefs, practices and experiences within the school community. Whilst religious observance as defined in the consultation paper is not an act of organised worship, it does not preclude the possibility of worship as the free response of individuals to the stimulus offered.

In distinguishing between religious observance and organised acts of worship, the consultation paper makes the following statement:

*'Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community's faith in "the focus of worship", may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the Review Group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, groups, chaplains and other religious leaders.'*

In relation to the second aspect, misgivings about the term '*religious observance*' within the contemporary educational context, the review group devoted a considerable amount of time to discussing the appropriateness of the term. Some respondents saw the use of the term as undermining the review group's concern with inclusiveness. Some members of the review group shared some of the concerns about the use of the term but came to the conclusion that it should be retained at present.

The following reasons are offered for retaining the term religious observance:

- it is the term used in the statutory documents
- no alternative term has been suggested which has gained universal support
- it recognises the fact that the reflective activity at the heart of the review group's definition of religious observance has traditionally, though not exclusively, taken place within the context of the great world religions
- though most people today in Scotland are not active members of religious communities, many still use the world views of these communities as the context for their search for meaning.

### The relationship between religious observance and religious and moral education

The consultation process identified concern at what was perceived to be a blurring of the distinction between religious observance and religious and moral education. The review group takes the view that religious observance is distinct from religious and moral education which is defined within the context of this review as follows:

Within the non-denominational sector, *Religious and Moral Education 5-14 National Guidelines* define the aims of religious education in terms of the knowledge and understanding of religions. The questions and answers that religions can offer about the nature and meaning of life and the development of the pupils' own beliefs, attitudes, values and practices through a process of personal search, discovery and critical evaluation.

Within the denominational sector, *Religious Education 5-14 Roman Catholic Schools*, states that the aim of religious education is to foster and deepen the children's faith.

Religious observance in all schools builds on the whole experience of education and not just the religious and moral education class by allowing pupils and staff space for celebrating and reflecting on their spirituality and on the shared values of the school.

# four: issues

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

## The frequency and quality of religious observance

During the consultation process a diverse range of views was expressed in relation to the frequency with which religious observance should take place, from those who felt that it should be on a daily basis to those who thought that there should be no religious observance in schools. There was widespread support for maintaining the status quo.

SOED Circular 6/91 stated that religious observance should take place at least weekly in primary schools and at least monthly in secondary schools. In providing this guidance, the Circular took the view that *'regularity is necessary to ensure an impact on pupils' experience. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of paramount importance.'* Frequency and quality were key elements of discussion in the course of the consultation.

The review group acknowledged the need to balance the frequency of religious observance to be such as to impact on the spiritual development of the school community with providing a valuable and inclusive experience of religious observance. The group recognised that the latter would require careful planning by schools, particularly in the early stages of moving towards any new arrangements. It concluded that every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community. In doing this, the review group wished to emphasise quality rather than quantity.

At present school assemblies are the most common vehicle for delivering religious observance. A clear distinction, however, has to be drawn between assemblies devised for the delivery of religious observance and assemblies which support other purposes. There will be times when the whole school community, or substantial groupings of pupils, will be gathered together for assemblies which are concerned with matters such as administrative announcements and reports of extra-curricular activities. Such assemblies form an important and necessary part of school life, but should be kept separate from assemblies organised for religious observance.

Whilst all were agreed on the importance of quality in relation to religious observance, issues were raised about how to achieve and evaluate this. In relation to achieving quality, the issues which are identified as locations, role of chaplain, exemplar material and training and the diversity and flexibility of approach are all pertinent. In relation to evaluation, the review group believes that the school itself should play the primary role in this and suggests that consideration be given to the development of a self-evaluation package.

### Locations for religious observance

Responses to the question on locations for religious observance identified the importance of a communal location within the school. All schools have areas such as assembly halls or gymnasias which have the potential for being appropriate locations for religious observance. In addition, to take account of the fact that religious observance may at times be organised on a group basis, the review group identified the need for schools to have a smaller area available for religious observance. This space could also be made available for organised acts of worship or private reflection. The review group would like to note the implications of appropriate locations for religious observance in terms of the planning and design of new school buildings.

### The role of chaplains in religious observance and organised acts of worship

During review group meetings issues were raised about the role of chaplains in non-denominational schools including concerns that their personal faith positions may be compromised.

The review group recognises the wide variety of roles which chaplains perform within schools, but within the context of this report will focus on the chaplains roles in relation to religious observance and organised acts of worship.

Central to the resolution of those issues would be a full discussion between head teacher and chaplain on how religious observance should be planned and implemented in order to address the needs of the school community. Such a discussion, in fact, should always take place when a chaplain is appointed to a school. The discussion should be based on the premise that the way in which religious observance in schools is implemented should be justifiable on educational grounds.

# four: issues

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

The review group advocates the involvement of a range of people – members of staff, pupils, members of chaplaincy teams including representatives from a range of traditions – in the planning, preparation and presentation of acts of religious observance. Each member of the chaplaincy team will be able to draw on the rich resources of their own religious tradition. These resources can be used by the group responsible for religious observance as stimulus material relevant to the school community's experience and understanding. Some chaplains may also draw on material from other sources including stories from other religions. Where chaplains are not comfortable with this, their stance should be respected and other members of the religious observance team would plan and implement the assembly or other activity when material from other traditions or faiths is being used.

Within the context of organised acts of worship within schools, the chaplain will be addressing members of their own faith communities. Within a context such as this a confessional approach is, of course, appropriate. This is an issue which could usefully be covered in the development of guidance on the role of chaplains and chaplaincy teams in schools.

## Exemplar material and training

The consultation process highlighted the need for exemplar material to illustrate how the revised guidance could be implemented. In addition it recognised the need for training for school staff and chaplains.

## Diversity and flexibility of approach

Concern was raised during the consultation process at a 'one-size-fits-all solution' to religious observance. The review group recognises the range of schools covered by this report – primary and secondary, urban and rural, denominational and non-denominational – and the different cultural contexts in which they are set and concurs with the concepts of diversity and flexibility. The guidance offered in this report sets out principles which provide a framework for religious observance in the twenty-first century but which are capable of being implemented according to the needs of the local school community.



A photograph of a cityscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a deep orange and yellow, with the sun low on the horizon. The city buildings and a bridge are silhouetted against the bright sky. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the city lights and the sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**five:** religious observance in  
the twenty-first century



## Conclusion

The activity currently designated religious observance has as its central concern the development of each individual within the school community as a *‘whole person’*.

This concern resonates with the commitment in

Such a commitment will result in a situation in which all aspects of the educational experience work together in a coherent and consistent manner to ensure that all pupils receive a balanced, valuable and inclusive education which prepares them for all aspects of life. Religious observance should act as a focus and catalyst for this commitment.

*Educating For Excellence to ‘realise the potential of every child in every community...’.*

# five: religious observance in the twenty-first century

The Report of the Religious Observance Review Group

Many school communities are characterised by a diversity of beliefs and practices reflecting a range of religious and other stances. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in the forms of religious observance devised by their school without compromise to their personal faith stances. This can best be guaranteed by involving a range of people from the school and community in the preparation, planning and presentation of the assembly or other gathering. Pupils should have a key role in this process.

One implication of this diversity is that the forms of religious observance devised may differ from school to school. This reflects the current move in Scottish education to give greater autonomy to local authorities and schools in making decisions on delivery based on local needs. At local authority and school level full consultation should take place with all interested parties on how religious observance should be implemented. The unifying principle behind the different approaches to religious observance will be the aims set out in this paper.

Regular assemblies or other gatherings for religious observance provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on, and develop, a deeper understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual and the shared values of the school community. The stimulus for reflection may be provided by incidents which occur in the life of the school or in the local, national or international communities, a programme of values which the school wishes its pupils and staff to reflect upon or the annual cycle of religious festivals.

It is appreciated that this view of religious observance involves what may be described as a paradigm shift in which religious observance is transformed from a peripheral position in many schools to a central role as a guarantor of the school's commitment to realising the full potential of every person in the school community. The recommendations set out in the following section are made with the intention of facilitating this process.

# Recommendations

The review group makes the following recommendations:

## Recommendation 1

The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) should review the Circular on religious observance to include:

a definition of religious observance as *community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community* and define the aims as *to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community*;

a statement that in terms of frequency every school should provide opportunities for religious observance at least six times in a school year in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community;

a statement that, subject to the above guidance, local authorities should be encouraged to devise forms of religious observance which take account of local circumstances and the needs of their particular pupils;

a statement that schools should consider requests for opportunities for organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum taking account of the availability of appropriate personnel and accommodation.

## Recommendation 2

SEED should provide further guidance on religious observance which takes account of research and development work on spiritual development and values. The guidance should incorporate a series of exemplars and the development of a self-evaluation toolkit which reflect the aims of religious observance as defined in this report.

### **Recommendation 3**

SEED should provide guidance for schools on the role of chaplains and chaplaincy teams in religious observance and in the overall life of the school. SEED should also develop self-evaluation tools that can be used by schools to evaluate the quality of religious observance provided for pupils.

### **Recommendation 4**

The review of the curriculum in Scotland, as outlined in *Educating for Excellence*, should consider the role of religious observance in future educational provision and should take account of the findings of this report.

### **Recommendation 5**

Schools are encouraged to ensure that when communal locations are used for religious observance they are prepared in an appropriate manner. In addition local authorities should give consideration to incorporating smaller areas appropriate for other forms of religious observance in the planning and design of new school buildings.

## Appendix 1 – Publications consulted

The following are the publications which were consulted by the review group:

*Moral and Religious Education in Scottish Schools (The Millar Report)*

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972

*Consultative Committee on the Curriculum. Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education. Bulletin 1: A Curricular Approach to Religious Education*

Scottish Education Department. Consultative Committee on the Curriculum. Scottish Central Committee on Education

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1978

*Religious Observance in Primary and Secondary Schools*

An interim report by HM Inspectors of Schools

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989

*Report of the Scottish Committee for Staff Development in Education ( SCOSDE)*

*Seminar SSB8: Religious Observance in Primary and Secondary Schools*

The Scottish Committee for Staff Development in Education, 1990

*Provision of Religious Education and Religious Observance in Primary and Secondary Schools: Circular 6/91*

Scottish Office Education Department, 1991

*Religious and Moral Education 5-14 National Guidelines*

Scottish Office Education Department, 1992

*Spiritual and Moral Development*

National Curriculum Council, Discussion Document, 1993

*Religious and Moral Education 5-14 Roman Catholic Schools*

Scottish Office Education Department, Scottish Catholic Education Commission, 1994

*Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools: Religious and Moral Education 1995-2000*

HM Inspectorate of Education, 2001

This consultation paper has four key themes that should be highlighted:

- the definition of religious observance as an educational activity within the context of Scottish schools;
- the idea that religious observance should be an activity for the enrichment of all members of the school community, staff as well as pupils;
- the idea that worship may on occasions be the natural response of some members of the school community to an act of religious observance;
- the distinction between organised worship and religious observance.

### Preamble

Religious observance is a statutory requirement in schools under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which repeats the legislation of previous Acts in giving education authorities ‘liberty to continue the said custom’ and prohibits them from discontinuing it without a poll of local electors. Parents have the legal right to withdraw their children if they wish.

The HMIE report *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools: Religious and Moral Education 1995-2000* stated that many secondary schools did not follow the advice contained in SOED Circular 6/91, where the Secretary of State advised that secondary schools should provide at least a monthly opportunity for religious observance. As a result of this report the Education Minister within the Scottish Executive set up a Review Group to advise on how schools could meet this requirement. Despite the focus on secondary schools in the report it was decided to expand the advice to include primary schools.

The remit of the Group is as follows:

“To review current guidance on arrangements for religious observance in schools, taking account of the views of interested bodies and individuals including religious organisations, teachers, parents and pupils; to make recommendations to Ministers on any changes which are required to ensure that revised guidance to schools is relevant and appropriate for pupils, that it fulfils the requirements of the 1980 Act and also provides practical advice on religious observance.”

In the standards and quality report HMI stated that they did not believe that many secondary schools were deliberately negligent but that headteachers found it difficult to take account of the Circular in ways which were meaningful in the social, cultural and educational contexts of the present day. Schools have difficulty because they are not sure what is meant by religious observance in a predominantly secular and increasingly multi-faith society.

### **What is meant by 'religious observance'?**

The Review Group defines the term for use in schools in Scotland as community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.

The Group believes that each individual within a school community has an entitlement to develop himself/herself as a spiritual being or 'whole person'. This entitlement includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one's dignity as a person. Defined in this way, religious observance is educationally justifiable and contributes to the 'whole-person' development of all members of the school community.

Religious observance as defined above can be distinguished from an organised act of worship. Worship is a free response of an individual and a community to 'what is considered worthy of worship'. This response involves three elements: belief in the reality of the focus of worship, desire to offer worship to the focus of worship and commitment to life stances related to the focus of worship.

Where the school community, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community's faith in 'the focus of worship', may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school. Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the Review Group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, groups, chaplains and other religious leaders.

The aims of religious observance are:

- to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community;
- to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.

In many schools there is a well-established tradition of using assemblies as a vehicle for religious observance, whether whole-school, year groups, stages or particular school groups such as houses. In any of these gatherings of the school community, the time set aside needs to be well planned to:

- provide opportunities for the community to reflect, with help, upon values, beliefs, commitments and hopes which are implicit in being human;
- provide opportunities for the school community to express and celebrate its shared values;
- give the school community time to reflect upon a range of stimuli from religious traditions and other sources such as literature, art and music;
- provide opportunities for the community to have space, stillness and time to respond to this reflection. In non-denominational, as well as denominational schools, the response of some members of the community may at times be in the form of worship, but for others it will be a period of meditation and reflection on what it is to be human or on the significant values of the school and wider community.

In the best practice, themes are carefully chosen to suit the school community's experience and understanding. The Review Group will develop exemplars that may help schools to review their present arrangements and provide genuine opportunities for the school community to reflect on educational and spiritual activities which enhance each member of the school community.

## Appendix 3 – Membership

NAME	REPRESENTING ORGANISATION
Anne Wilson (Chair)	Association of Directors of Education
Mike Baughan OBE	Learning and Teaching Scotland
Reverend Thomas Boyle	Catholic Education Commission
John Brown	HM Inspectorate of Education
Linda Coad	Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Hakim Din	Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland
Iain Gray	Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education
Susan Leslie	Church of Scotland Committee on Education
Bill Milligan	Association of Head Teachers in Scotland
Colin Mitchell	Headteachers' Association of Scotland
Sharon Schlesinger	Scottish Inter Faith Council
Alan Smith	Scottish School Board Association
Dianna Wolfson	Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

The Group also sought the views of Elizabeth Templeton during the latter stages of the Review.



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