



Position Statement Review of Denominational Schools in Midlothian November 2019

As part of Midlothian Council's Learning Estate Strategy 2017, we agreed to a review of our Denominational (RC) schools in Midlothian and it is important that you are aware of the context surrounding denominational Education in Midlothian and how we are pro-actively addressing the issues facing the local authority, in relation to providing quality learning and teaching in our denominational schools.

Denominational or faith schools have been part of the state sector since the Education (Scotland) Act 1918 allowed such schools, which until then had been independent schools, to transfer to local authority control. In accordance with Section 17 of the 1980 Act, local authorities may establish a denominational school for any denomination or faith if they are satisfied that such a school is required. Midlothian Council fully supports this approach.

Currently in Midlothian we have approximately 400 primary pupils who align themselves to the Catholic faith. These children are educated in 7 primary schools across the county and we have 67 teaching staff and 5 Catholic Head Teachers (3 with shared posts) in these schools. Of this teaching cohort, only 27 teachers are Roman Catholic with RC 'Approval'. All head teachers and senior staff in denominational schools must have Catholic Church approval.

Due to the issue of Roman Catholic 'Approval' requirements i.e. all teaching staff in denominational primary schools must not only have approval from the Catholic Church but they must also have completed the Catholic Teaching certificate if they are to teach Religious Education, we have not had the numbers we need of Catholic Teachers applying for posts in Midlothian. As acknowledged by the Diocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh this is not just a Midlothian issue, it is an issue faced by other authorities particularly in the East of Scotland. In addition, Midlothian Council has not had any RC student placements or Newly Qualified Teachers for the last three years from the faculty of Education at Glasgow University or the Moray House Faculty at Edinburgh University.

In order to overcome this and to ensure we have teachers in our denominational schools, we employ non RC teachers in Catholic schools permanently to the Authority and place them in our Catholic schools and we no longer ask our staff to seek RC approval as we have live and previous examples of where approval was not given. We discussed this issue at our meeting with the Diocese and they were supportive of Midlothian's position and offered to circulate vacancies and training opportunities. However, any decisions regarding changes to 'Approval Policy' would lie with an overarching group called the Bishops Conference of Scotland.
<https://www.bcos.org.uk/>

Concerns have been raised that Midlothian Council is trying to diminish denominational education due to the Denominational Review where in fact we are trying hard to protect it by being pro-active in our actions. We have worked with RC Head teachers, Vic Bourne (Denominational Representative on the Council) and The Catholic Church over the last year to look at what can be done and came up with the various discussion models to ensure that we will have Catholic Education going forward.

Those models went out to informal consultation in September this year and we are now working on the feedback from those consultations and will then engage with the community and bring the outcome to Council for approval. As a safeguard for the continued provision of denominational education, the Education (Scotland) Act (1980) requires an education authority to submit for Ministers consent a proposal which if implemented, would have an effect on pupils who attend these schools and engage in a formal consultation process. We aim to complete the pre-consultation stage in the coming months and commence the formal consultation process early next year.

As discussed at the pre-consultation meetings this process will take us well into 2020 before we get any approval from the Council or Education Scotland or indeed Scottish Government if it is 'called-in'. The implementation then would not be until 2021/22. While we appreciate the time taken to review and carry out consultation can cause uncertainty for all our stakeholders it is not our aim to diminish denominational provision. Our aim as noted in the 2017-2047 Learning Estate Strategy, is that we aspire to ensure that each learning community is equipped to support all our pupils in Primary and Secondary Schools and we strongly believe the possibility of attaining excellence should be available to every one of our learners regardless of background, prior achievement or socio-economic group.

We hope that this statement has assisted you in understanding the position here in Midlothian and our attempts to ensure we have good quality learning and teaching in our Catholic primary schools going forward and we want you to be involved in the process we are undertaking to ensure we strengthen our provision and continue to deliver denominational education in Midlothian.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

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