

Ann Jones AC / AM
Chair – Children & Young People Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

6th September 2013

Dear Ms Jones,

Consultation Response – Education (Wales) Bill

We write further to your letter dated 8th July 2013 inviting submissions in relation to the Education (Wales) Bill.

The Catholic Education Service (“CES”) is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (“Bishops’ Conference”). The Bishops’ Conference is the permanent assembly of all the Catholic bishops throughout the two countries and the CES, as an agency of the Bishops’ Conference, is charged with promoting and securing Catholic education on behalf of the bishops throughout those two countries.

The CES broadly welcomes measures to improve the education system in Wales which this Bill is seeking to bring about. We do, however, have some concerns in relation to provision of the Bill, specifically as it relates to the changes to the requirements in relation to school term dates. Whilst we can understand the desire to harmonise dates, in practice we do not consider that the measures that are being taken will necessarily have the desired effect. Even in the event that Welsh Ministers were able to bring about harmonisation of term dates throughout Wales there are still likely to be cross board issues with children in the same family attending schools in England.

We would agree that it is important to encourage close working on these matters between, not only a single local authority and schools within the local authority area, but with adjoining local authorities. It is however, in our experience, difficult for those who are not of the faith to understand the importance of religious holy days and the need for observance of them. This is most often apparent in discussions about holidays around the Easter period. Easter is the most important time in the Christian calendar and it is therefore imperative that Catholic schools are able to set holidays so that they can ensure observance, particularly around this most important religious festival, in accordance with Church teachings. The Governing Body must be in a position to ensure that it is meeting the needs of pupils’, their families and the wider Church, particularly as it relates to religious observance.

Of particular concern is the suggestion that the Welsh Minister may choose to override arrangements, arrived at by local discourse and agreement, and impose different term dates. Paragraph 147 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill would seem to suggest that an event such as the Ryder Cup may be a good reason for occasional variation of term dates for certain schools whereas it is apparent from the remainder of the Memorandum that celebrating the holiest time of the Christian year is not. In our view it is entirely possible that the imposition of term dates on schools with a religious character may override the rights of those within such schools to manifest their religion and belief.

Yours sincerely,



Christine Fischer
Assistant Director & Legal Adviser