

Joint Committee on Human Rights  
House of Commons  
7 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 3JA

19 February 2010

Dear Members of the JCHR

## Government amendment 70 – Children, Schools and Families Bill

I was very pleased to read your conclusions about clauses in the Children, Schools and Families Bill which allow parental withdrawal from sex and relationships education under the age of 15, and which permit the teaching of PSHE to be delivered in a way that is appropriate to the religious and cultural backgrounds of the pupils.

I'm afraid the situation has worsened since your scrutiny of the Bill, as Ed Balls has recently tabled an amendment which states the principles of PSHE do not prevent schools from causing or allowing PSHE to be taught in a way which reflects the school's religious character.

Amendment 70 substantially weakens the application of these principles in faith schools and is wrong in principle. If passed, it would allow the religious character of a school to override duties to promote equality and accept diversity. We do not believe that this amendment balances the rights of children to a dignified life free from discrimination with the rights of faith schools to practise their religion. It is not consistent with Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the aims of education). You will be aware of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on the aims of education (2001) which, *inter alia*, reiterates 'the need for a balanced approach to education and one which succeeds in reconciling diverse values through dialogue and respect for difference'. It further states:

*Approaches [to education] which do no more than seek to superimpose the aims and values of [Article 29(1)] on the existing system without encouraging any deeper changes are clearly inadequate. The relevant values cannot be effectively integrated into, and thus be rendered consistent with, a broader curriculum unless those who are expected to transmit, promote, teach and, as far as possible, exemplify the values have themselves been convinced of their importance.*

In addition to the potential negative impact on all children attending faith schools, we fear that this watering down of the principles for PSHE may be used as a justification by some schools for not delivering SRE appropriate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people. At best it is unnecessary given provisions in the Bill requiring respect for religious diversity; at worst it sends an unacceptable signal from government that it colludes in discriminatory teaching.

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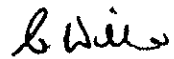
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I hope the Committee will decide to scrutinise the Bill again in light of this new amendment.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Willow'.

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