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Your ref: 2423

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Dear Peter

SHARED EDUCATION BILL

Your correspondence of 11 December refers.

The Minister has noted the Committee's request to provide assurance at consideration stage on the interpretation of the 'reasonable numbers' in respect of rural or other schools or areas with low numbers of children from a minority community. The Minister has indicated that he is content that a flexible approach will be taken in respect of reasonable numbers so as not to disadvantage any school, especially small rural schools. He has signalled that he is content to do so.

Religious Belief/Community Background

The term 'Religious Belief' in paragraph 1(2)(a) of the Bill reflects the wording of the relevant S75 category.

Statistics on 'religion' are routinely collected at individual pupil level by schools and other educational providers. Community background is not routinely collected – to do so would impose further administrative burden on educational providers.

Equality Commission S75 monitoring guidance indicates that there are two options for monitoring religious belief – that of current stated religion or community background.

The guidance goes on to say that “*for the purpose of S75, the current stated religion question is more appropriate as it better recognises the increasing diversity of society here*”.

The Equality Commission’s guidance indicates that community background is designed for the specific purpose of Fair Employment monitoring and only distinguishes between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Yours sincerely

Russell

RUSSELL WELSH
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer