The Church of England Education Office has today written to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) following the publication of its draft unedited version of a periodic paper - CRC/C/GBR/CO/5.

The aim is to clarify the legal, regulatory and historic framework around collective worship and request that the CRC amend their periodic paper to ensure that it accurately reflects the position in England and Wales.

The proposals in the UN paper to amend statutory requirements for collective worship, if enacted, would result in a separation of treatment of pupils based on the type of school they attend. The regulation of community schools with regard to collective worship is subject to statute but for voluntary schools or foundation schools that have a religious character then worship must be either in accordance with the requirements of the school trust deed or where there is no such provision in a deed "in accordance with the tenets or religious practices of the religion or religious denomination".

Speaking in response to the draft paper, Rev Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer for the Church of England said: 'Children flourish when they can develop spiritually and emotionally as well as academically. We believe time set aside daily to be still, contemplate life's challenges and learn about faith in action is crucial. It is possible to opt out of collective worship but in our experience this very rarely happens not least because children themselves enjoy this time of the school day.'

'Whilst we welcome debate on the relevance of collective worship to children and their school communities, we want this to be held in the knowledge of the full current and historic framework that applies to all publicly funded schools. Our submission to the UN requests that they look again at this and ensure that their report demonstrates a full grasp of the situation in England and Wales.'

ENDS

Notes for editors

The CRC has published a draft unedited version of a periodic paper - CRC/C/GBR/CO/5. Section D, Civil Rights and Freedoms refers inter alia to collective worship in publicly funded schools (paras 34 and 35).

The submission to the CRC can be found here.