



Managing withdrawal from RE

Advice and guidance for schools

Introduction

This document provides guidance and support for head teachers, senior leaders and teachers of RE to manage the right of withdrawal in their school. It explains the purpose of RE in the curriculum, the legal framework and includes practical advice on managing withdrawals. This advice has been produced as supporting material for the Local Agreed RE syllabus for Calderdale, Kirklees and Leeds, 'Believing and Belonging' but the essential elements will apply to any state funded school in England. It can be read in conjunction with other documents listed below.

The Purpose of RE in the curriculum

RE is for all pupils in all schools, every pupil has a legal entitlement to RE. It is a necessary part of a 'broad and balanced curriculum' and must be provided for all registered pupils in state-funded schools in England, including those in the sixth form, unless withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over). This requirement does not apply to pupils below compulsory school age (although there are many examples of good practice of RE in nursery classes). Special schools should ensure that every pupil receives RE 'as far as is practicable'. The 'basic' school curriculum includes the National Curriculum, RE, and relationships and sex education.

RE is locally determined, not nationally. It is determined by a locally agreed syllabus recommended by the standing advisory committee for RE (SACRE) for adoption by a local authority. Maintained schools without a religious character must follow the locally agreed syllabus. Voluntary controlled schools with a religious character should follow the locally agreed syllabus unless parents request RE in accordance with the trust deed or religious designation of their school. Voluntary aided schools with a religious character should provide RE in accordance with the trust deed or religious designation of their school unless parents request the locally agreed syllabus. In many of these school types there will be an overarching body, such as a diocese, which can offer support.

RE is compulsory for all pupils in academies and free schools as set out in their funding agreements. This is a contractual responsibility. Academies may use their locally agreed syllabus, a different locally agreed syllabus (with the permission of the SACRE concerned) or may devise their own curriculum.

The law requires all schools to teach about Christianity and other world faiths. These normally include Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. However, there is enormous diversity within these traditions, and this should be recognised in curriculum planning. The local agreed syllabus (Believing and Belonging) also encourages schools to study other faiths and traditions not included in the six world religions defined in guidance. Schools have discretion in this and should reflect the community and context within which they work.

The syllabus, 'Believing and Belonging' states that a school's curriculum should include systematic teaching of Christianity, other world faiths and a non-religious approach throughout all key stages. This is done through a progressive study of six core pathways.

One of the key roles of RE in schools is to support community cohesion and the development of SMSC and Fundamental British Values. Teachers and schools should take every opportunity to widen the opportunities for all pupils. This could be by:

- Celebrating a variety of local, national and international festivals e.g. Festivals of light
- Understanding how different people celebrate both religious and non-religious festivals
- Charity work including refugee week, children in need, sports relief
- Remembrance Day
- Interfaith Week and including diversity of religious belief and faiths e.g. Bahá'í
- National and international awareness days/ weeks

Parental right to withdrawal

In the UK, parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to make their own provision. This alternative will be the parents' responsibility. This right of withdrawal exists for all pupils in all types of school, including schools with and without a religious designation. Students aged 18 or over have the right to withdraw themselves from RE. Parents also have the right to withdraw their child from part of RE and can do so without giving any explanation.

Dealing with parental requests to withdraw from RE

This section outlines suggested good practice for managing a request for withdrawal from RE. Unless there are good reasons otherwise, a request should be made in writing so there is a clear record.

Opportunity should be given to discuss the request, so this can be properly understood. However, this cannot be made a legal condition nor does a parent have to explain their reasons if they choose not to do so. Once known, there should be a conversation about the practical implications of withdrawal and the circumstances in which it may be reasonable to accommodate their wishes.

A parent may be reassured through things such as: an offer to observe a lesson; discussing curriculum documents; and discussing the aims of RE in your school, maybe referring to the Purpose of RE outlined above.

If a pupil is withdrawn, the school has a duty of care to look after them, but not to provide alternative education. There are different ways of handling this, but any arrangements made must not incur extra cost for the school or local authority. This time should not be used for other curriculum subject areas, such as extra maths or other lessons. It is good practice to review withdrawals from RE each year with parents.

Managing withdrawals- practical advice

Practical suggestions on managing withdrawals have been compiled by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE). These are summarised here:

1. Include a short statement about RE being inclusive in your prospectus and on your website. You may find the Purpose of RE section above helpful in preparing this.
2. Use parents' evenings, assemblies and displays to showcase what goes on in RE lessons and to promote religious literacy, cultural diversity and visits to places of worship.
3. Give information about withdrawal on your website after positive explanations about RE in your school.
4. Parents have a right of withdrawal from all or part of RE. Some schools choose to state that they are not supportive of selective withdrawal from part of RE. This does not override a parental right to withdraw from part of RE – if requested, this partial withdrawal must be granted. It is important to remember the contribution RE makes to the SMSC development of children and the promotion of Fundamental British Values.
5. Ask parents considering withdrawal to contact the head teacher to arrange a discussion. Ensure that parents who wish to withdraw their children are met with quickly.
6. Discuss the religious issues the parents would object to their child being taught about.
7. Show parents the kinds of things you do in RE by showing the locally agreed syllabus, aims of RE, learning objectives and examples of lessons.
8. If a parent has withdrawn their child from RE it is good practice to review this with the parent every year.
9. Parents can only withdraw their child from RE, not other curriculum areas. For example, pupils can't be withdrawn from a study of religious art in an art lesson or the study of evolution in science.

Further details of the guidance produced by the NAHT and NATRE can be found here <https://www.naht.org.uk/advice-and-support/curriculum-and-assessment/dealing-with-requests-to-withdraw-from-religious-education/>

Other useful guidance

The documents below offer further guidance and advice for schools. They are available, as appropriate, in Kirklees Business Solutions or Leeds for Learning – and most local documents can also be downloaded from www.penninelearning.com.

- Enriching Understanding and Tolerance of Different Faiths (Sharing the Journey)
- Advice and Guidance on Collective Worship (available for Calderdale, Kirklees and Leeds, 2024)
- Religious Believers Visiting Schools: a code of conduct (NATRE, 2007)
- Using visitors in the classroom to support PSHE (PSHE Association, 2016)

- Believing and Belonging: The Local Agreed Syllabus for West Yorkshire (2024)

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