

Newham Sacre's advice on withdrawal: Policies and Responsibilities

RE and Withdrawal

(Please read in conjunction with DFES Circular 1/94)

These guidelines apply only to RE (not collective worship)

Text in standard type is from the 1/94 circular. *Text in italics is LA additional guidance.*

1. If a parent/carer asks that a pupil should be wholly excused from attending any RE in the school, then the school must comply. Parents are not obliged to give reasons for the withdrawal. The school has a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Where the pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parents want the pupil to receive. These arrangements will be made by the parents, the school is not expected to make these arrangements. *It is good to meet with the parents to discuss their concerns and in many cases, the parents will want their child to continue with their RE lessons once they understand the nature of RE is not to nurture certain views. On some occasions, it is through a lack of understanding that withdrawal is requested by parents/carers, and discussion allows fears and misunderstandings to be addressed. Newham SACRE are very happy to support schools with discussions with parents/carers around the nature of RE and why we would like all children to receive it here in Newham. Do contact the RE advisor if your school would like some support in handling any request.*

If parents want to pursue withdrawal from RE, it is our practice here in Newham that they must write to the headteacher and governors to make this request. This request will then be discussed at the next governors meeting and a decision made about how the school will cover this request.

A historical note: Withdrawal from RE was given many years ago to parents and carers when RE was confessional in nature. This allowed parents/carers to withdraw their children from receiving Bible based teaching from the local Christian priest. However, the nature of subject content of RE is now not confessional, but rather educational, balanced and broad. Therefore, no parents should need to withdraw their child. Here in Newham our agreed syllabus has been put together by teachers, councillors and faith representatives from all major different faiths, as well as secular world views ensuring our curriculum is broad and inclusive. In 2018 we had 17 pupils withdrawn from RE, showing the agreed syllabus works for our community, supported by councillors, faith representatives and secular world views.

2. A pupil may, if the parent requests this, be withdrawn from the school premises to receive RE elsewhere, so long as the Local Authority (LA) is satisfied that this will not interfere with the child's attendance at school other than at the beginning or end of any school session. If this is not possible and the parents wish their child to receive separate RE, the school is required to allow such education to take place in the school providing it does not have to meet the cost and the request is not unreasonable. *These practical implications of withdrawal should be made clear to the parents at a meeting, and the school should be clear about what is reasonable e.g. space, supervision, the parents need to organise their child's work for 1 hr a week in RE time – the school does not organise what the child does.*

4. If RE is taught as part of an integrated Humanities programme or in conjunction with other National Curriculum subjects, parents do not have the right to withdraw their children from the RE elements of these programmes. *It is important that parents know when RE is occurring within such programmes. A leaflet or guide to the RE curriculum may be one way to help parents and avoid withdrawals in such circumstances. See appendix A in agreed syllabus.*

5. When religious or spiritual matters come up in other areas of the curriculum – both planned and spontaneously - this does not constitute RE in the legal sense. Parents could not insist that their child be withdrawn every time such issues arise. *These issues are helping the child in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this can be mentioned to parents.*

6. It is good practice to insert a line about this in your school prospectus/website, such as: 'RE is provided for all pupils, and is inclusive and broad minded. Parents do have the right to withdraw pupils from RE: if you wish to do this, make an appointment with the head teacher / RE subject leader. The school does not support selective withdrawal from RE'.

It is best practice for a school to have a withdrawal policy statement of procedures, so that all teachers are clear how to handle such a request or demand from a pupil or parent when and if they arise. In your copy of the Agreed Syllabus there is a list of who has been part of making Newham's agreed syllabus in appendix F2 and have given it their approval. This is a useful place to start in a discussion with parents as sometimes once they understand what is going on in their child's RE lessons, and they find out it has been passed by their faith leaders/world view and the majority of faith groups in Newham they are not so worried about their child receiving RE.

7. Finally a child can not be in for their religion in RE and out for all the others. Our practice in Newham is that they are either withdrawn from everything or nothing. If the parents are choosing to withdraw their child it is often good to emphasis that this is a shame as it will mean they will not have the opportunity to talk about their faith/world view and how they 'do' things in their home or place of worship, the beliefs that are important to them and their family.

We do along partial withdrawal from visits to places of worship. So parents can withdraw their child from visiting a particular place of worship or all places of worship. Again, we would want to work hard that this is not the case, and SACRE reps are available to schools to support any conversations with parents as needed.

8. Teachers may withdraw from the teaching of RE unless they have been specifically employed to teach or lead and manage RE, or are a member of the senior leadership team. An application to withdraw must be given in writing to the head and chair of governors. Pupils must not miss out on RE teaching because a teacher has withdrawn from teaching RE. The school must make alternative provision for the pupils to be taught RE. *Newham SACRE hopes that no teachers would feel the need to withdrawal from the teaching of RE in Newham as our curriculum is broad, balanced and takes account of people with very different views. It would hope that all teachers would be open to the challenge of diversity of beliefs and like the philosophical questioning approach the syllabus takes.*