

Religious Education and Collective Worship: Withdrawal

Pupils

All pupils are entitled to receive RE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum at school which promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The Religious Education lessons will be based on the curriculum outlined in the local Agreed Syllabus.

There may be times when a parent (or a pupil age 18 or over) may make a withdrawal request.

Managing the right of withdrawal

The use of the right to withdraw should be at the instigation of parents (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over), and it should be made clear whether it is from the whole of the subject or specific parts of it. No reasons need be given.

Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from RE without influence from the school, although a school should ensure parents or carers are informed of this right and are aware of the educational objectives and content of the RE syllabus. In this way, parents can make an informed decision.

Schools should ensure that parents who want to withdraw their children from RE are aware of the RE syllabus and that it is relevant to all pupils and respects their own personal beliefs.

LAs and schools should bear in mind that the way in which RE is organised must reflect the duty to teach the agreed syllabus or what is provided according to a trust deed, and that parents must be enabled to exercise their rights to request that their child should be excused from RE.

Parents should be made aware of its learning objectives and what is covered in the RE curriculum, based on the Agreed Syllabus or according to the trust deed, and should be given the opportunity to discuss this, if they wish.

The school may also wish to review such a request each year, in discussion with the parents.

Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right must be respected, and where RE is integrated in the curriculum, the school will need to discuss the arrangements with the parents or carers to explore how the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated.

Pupils will usually remain on school premises. Where a pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parent wants the pupil to receive. Outside arrangements for RE are allowed as long as the LA is satisfied that any interference with the pupil's attendance at school resulting from the withdrawal will affect only the start or end of a school session.

If pupils are withdrawn from RE, schools have a duty to supervise them (if at school), though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost.

Experience suggests that, to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher will find it helpful to establish with any parent wanting to exercise the right of withdrawal:

- the religious issues about which the parent would object to his or her child being taught;
- the practical implications of withdrawal;
- the circumstances in which the school can reasonably be expected to accommodate parental wishes; and
- whether the parent will require any advanced notice of such RE, and, if so, how much.

Collective worship

All registered pupils attending a maintained school should take part in daily collective worship.

Collective worship in schools should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes.

Collective Worship: Exercise of right of withdrawal

The parental right to withdraw a child from attending collective worship should be freely exercisable and a school must give effect to any such request.

Parents are not obliged to state their reasons for seeking withdrawal.

The right of withdrawal from collective worship would normally be exercised through the physical withdrawal of the pupil from the place where the act of worship is taking place. Indeed, the school could insist that this is the way the right is to be implemented. If, however, both the parent and the school agree that the pupil should be allowed to remain physically present during the collective worship but not take part in it, nothing in the law prevents this.

Experience suggests that, to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher will find it helpful to establish with any parent wanting to exercise the right of withdrawal:

- the elements of worship in which the parent would object to the child taking part;
- the practical implications of withdrawal; and
- whether the parent will require any advanced notice of such worship, and, if so, how much.

Complaints

Every school governing body and LA is required by law to have an accessible and easily understood route through which parents and others can make a complaint about school or other educational matters, including RE.

A copy of the local complaints procedure should be available in each school and the school prospectus must make reference to it.

LAs can seek advice from their SACREs in addressing complaints about RE. As far as RE is concerned, the complaints procedure of an LA should fully acknowledge the rights of the governing bodies of schools where they are responsible for RE (voluntary-aided and academies).

Parents and carers can obtain information on their child's RE from the LA or school.

They should receive information from the school on how their child is progressing in the subject.

The parent of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school has the right to request that the pupil be excused from all or part of the RE provided. They do not have to provide a reason and the school must comply with their request.

The responsibilities of governors and headteachers

Checklist for governors and headteachers:

- Do we understand our legal obligations: statutory obligations to Religious Education?
- Does our governing body and headteacher adhere to these legal obligations?
- Do all pupils make progress in achieving the learning objectives of the RE curriculum?
- Is RE well led and effectively managed?
- Are standards, achievement and quality of provision in RE regularly and effectively self-evaluated?
- Are those teaching RE suitably qualified and trained in the subject? Do they have regular and effective opportunities for CPD?
- Are teachers aware of RE's contribution to developing pupils' understanding of religion and belief and its impact as part of the duty to promote community cohesion?
- Where appropriate, do pupils have opportunities to take courses leading to an accredited qualification in the subject?
- Do we provide clear information for parents on the RE curriculum and the right to withdraw?
- Are teachers aware that they do not have to teach RE?
- Is RE resourced, staffed and timetabled in a way that means the school can fulfill its legal obligations on RE and pupils can make good progress?
- Where there are insufficient teachers in a school who are prepared to teach RE, does the headteacher ensure that pupils receive their RE entitlement?

Checklist for managing the right of withdrawal

- Is the school careful to ensure that RE is of educational value to all pupils, whatever their belief background, thus reducing the likelihood of parental/carer requests for withdrawal?
- Does the school ensure that the nature, objectives and content of RE are shared with parents?
- Are parents or carers notified about plans for RE as part of the curriculum for the coming session for their child's class?
- Does the school have a procedure in place for parents or carers who want to withdraw children from RE?
- Does the organisation of the curriculum allow parents to exercise the right of withdrawal?
- What practical implications arise from a request by parents to withdraw a child from RE and how might they be addressed?
- Are all those who teach RE aware of the school's procedures?
- Are all teachers aware of their own right not to have to teach RE?

Case study: Managing the right of withdrawal

In one school, parents approached the head teacher with a request to discuss whether or not to withdraw their child from RE. The head teacher met them and showed them a copy of the locally agreed syllabus, together with the school's policy and scheme of work for RE. The parents were also invited to join an RE lesson to see how the school's policy worked in practice. This provided reassurance that the approach being adopted was one of genuine open enquiry which would respect the beliefs of all children. As a result, the parents decided not to exercise their right of withdrawal.

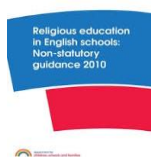
In another school, in Year 7 RE is taught in blocked topics as part of an integrated studies programme along with English, history, geography and citizenship. The teachers discussed the programme with the parents whose child had been withdrawn from RE and agreed to vary some of the work to accommodate the parents' wishes. The pupil took a full and active part in the lessons but was provided with slightly modified resources and tasks. As a result, the benefits of the integrated approach to teaching RE and the rights of the parents were both protected.

In a primary school, a number of parents from a local Jehovah's Witness community expressed a wish to withdraw their children from RE. The headteacher met with representatives from the community, including some of its leaders, to explain the school's approach to the subject. As a result of the meeting, the school developed a relationship of trust with the community and was able to identify those aspects of the RE programme which the parents were happy for the children to join and those from which the children would be withdrawn – mainly around the celebration of Christmas.

References

Religious Education in English Schools non-Statutory Guidance 2010

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190260/D-CSF-00114-2010.pdf



Religious education and collective worship (Circular 1/94) Issued 31 January 1994, this circular contains extensive guidance on the duty of local education authorities, standing advisory council on religious education (SACREs) and agreed syllabus conferences (ASCs), regarding religious education and collective worship. This remains extant regarding guidance on collective worship.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dfecircular1-94.pdf>

