

SACRE Guidance on Withdrawal from RE

Parents have always had the right to withdraw their children from RE but the law was not designed to be used in the way it is being used by some parents.

Legal Requirements

RE is for all pupils and every pupil is legally entitled to Religious Education as part of a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. RE must be provided for all registered pupils in state-funded schools in England (this includes sixth form pupils) unless they are withdrawn by their parents or have withdrawn themselves once reaching 18 years of age or older). Nursery pupils are not required to have compulsory RE teaching, although often there is good practice in this area seen in nursery classes. Special schools should teach RE to their pupils 'as far as is practicable'.

RE Curriculum

RE is locally determined, not nationally, and schools in Coventry and Warwickshire follow the Coventry and Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus, as recommended by SACRE. Schools must interact with the Agreed Syllabus in the following ways:

- All 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 and an overseeing body such as the local diocese may provide 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 can choose to use the Coventry and Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus, a different locally agreed syllabus (it is important you gain permission of the SACRE concerned) or may choose to devise their own RE curriculum.

Withdrawal from RE

Parental right of withdrawal from RE was first granted in 1944 when curricular RE was called 'Religious Instruction' and, as such, had connotations of induction into the Christian faith. RE is very different now. It takes account of world faiths and non-religious world views so that children can learn about and from religious traditions without being inducted into those traditions. In the UK, 70+ years later, parents still have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to provide their own RE. This RE provision will be the parents' responsibility. This right of withdrawal exists for all pupils in all types of school, including schools that do and do not have a religious designation. Students who are aged 18 or over also have the right to withdraw themselves from RE. Parents can also exercise the right to withdraw their child from part of RE, and can do so without giving any explanation. Locally, SACRE has become aware that many schools are facing parents withdrawing their child(ren) from visits to places of worship, specifically mosques.

Teachers also have the right to withdraw from the teaching of RE. However, this does not apply to teachers who have been specifically employed to teach or lead RE. If a teacher does wish to withdraw from the teaching of RE, a letter requesting this must be submitted to the head of the school and its chair of governors. If a teacher withdraws from the teaching of RE, the school must still make provisions for the pupils to receive their entitlement regarding RE.

A recent publication produced jointly by NATRE and NAHT called *Guidance: Dealing with withdrawal from RE* recommends the following 10 tips for dealing with withdrawal requests from parents:

Ten tips to manage the right of withdrawal in your school

- 1. Include a short statement about RE being inclusive in your prospectus and on your website. Inclusive RE is essential.*
- 2. Give information about withdrawal on your website after positive explanations about what RE in your school is. Parents are often trying to withdraw from something you don't do.*
- 3. 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.*
- 4. Parents have a right of withdrawal from all of RE 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.*
- 5. Ask parents considering withdrawal to contact the head teacher to arrange a discussion.*
- 6. Ensure that parents who wish to withdraw their children are met with quickly.*
- 7. Discuss the religious issues the parents would object to their child being taught about.*
- 8. 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.*
- 9. If a parent has withdrawn their child from RE it is good practice to review this with the parent every year.*
- 10. 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 parts of the history curriculum such as the study of Christian conversions.*

(*Guidance: Dealing with Withdrawal from RE* is available here:

https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/18-15676_NAHT%20RE%20withdrawal%20document_final.pdf and contains useful case studies for dealing with situations you may face in your own school).