



The Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education

Southwell and Nottingham Diocesan guidance document

This guidance note is intended to support school leaders in navigating requests for withdrawal from Religious Education. This guidance document provides an interim update and will be refreshed as further guidance becomes available.

Religious Education (RE) is central to the education offered within a Church of England school. It is a statutory requirement for all schools. RE is an important and meaningful academic discipline for all pupils, to enable them to gain knowledge, scholarly thinking and the religious literacy to engage with the world around them.

RE is the academic study of religious and non-religious worldviews. RE in all schools in England must reflect the fact that “the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain” (Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996).

In Church of England schools, there is an expectation that at least 50% of the RE curriculum will engage with Christian worldviews. It is expected that all pupils, in all statutory year groups will receive RE teaching which meets these expectations.

The expectations for RE in a Church of England school are outlined in the Statement of Entitlement for RE [Statement of Entitlement](#).

The Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education

Pupils may be withdrawn from RE or part of RE by a parent or guardian (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998; teachers can also exercise their right to withdraw from teaching the subject.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to provide t

heir own RE. This provision will be the parents’ responsibility.

Parents also have the right to withdraw their child from part of RE and can do so without giving any explanation. When a request to withdraw is received by a school, the request

should be granted without delay. The school may offer to speak with the parent to try to understand the basis for the withdrawal but only after the request has been granted.

The school must make clear that the parent's right to withdraw their child has been granted and that parents are not required to give reasons for their request.

Procedures for withdrawal

As a principle, the school should ensure that RE is sufficiently 'objective, critical and pluralistic', and fully accessible for all its pupils.

The school should ensure it has a clear policy and written procedures for handling a withdrawal request or parental complaint about RE which complies with the law. Clear procedures for both should be set out within the school's RE Policy and made available to parents, e.g. through the school website and in curriculum information. Where multiple languages are spoken, translations of these documents should be made available where possible.

The 2025 Supreme Court judgement ([JR87](#)) recognises that parents who wish to withdraw their child(ren) from RE must not encounter any burden in so doing. In order not to place an 'undue burden' on parents (or the pupil if in post-16 provision), requests for withdrawal should be granted without question since parents/ pupils are not required to give a reason to exercise the right to withdraw.

It is appropriate for a school to request this in writing, to avoid doubt at a later date. When dealing with a withdrawal, the school should describe to the parents what alternative arrangements will be made for their child. It is important that good records are kept of the parent/carer(s)' request and the associated actions in case of any challenges at a later date.

Wherever possible, the school should find ways to communicate with parents/ carers about the value of RE and the approach taken within the school to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. For example, at Curriculum meetings or in induction booklets.

Alternative Arrangements for Withdrawn Pupils

The National Society for Education (NSE) recommends that any pupils who have been withdrawn from RE should be provided with reasonable alternative arrangements. It is important to note that whilst the process of withdrawal must not place an 'undue burden' on the parents, neither should the withdrawal result in any additional cost or disruption to the school.

Alternative arrangements should not be used as an opportunity for timetabling another curriculum subject (such as Maths or English), for interventions or 'catch up' work but where possible should ensure that the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural needs of the

pupil(s) are attended to. There is no requirement to provide alternative RE, for example study of a different religious or non-religious worldview instead.

Further information

The Department for Education has published non-statutory guidance on RE; this can be found [here](#).

Church of England schools and academies are expected to meet the expectations set down in the Statement of Entitlement [Statement of Entitlement](#); this document is used as the basis of the inspection of RE under Section 48 (SIAMS inspection).

School leaders should note that this guidance reflects the current national position and will be updated if national policy changes. It does not constitute legal advice; where context-specific guidance is needed, leaders should contact Louisa Newton (Lead for Ethos, RE and SIAMS) louisa.newton@southwell.anglican.org for further information.