

Guidance: dealing with withdrawal from RE



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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. Surveys and anecdotes suggest that more parents are exercising their right to withdraw their child from some or all of RE. In the 2018 NATRE primary survey, almost 16 per cent of the schools surveyed said they had some parents using the right of withdrawal.

Whilst withdrawing their children remains a right for parents, the law was not designed to be used in the way it is being used by some. This guide, produced by NATRE, clarifies the law and offers suggestions for dealing with specific withdrawal scenarios. For more information on RE in schools, go to www.natre.org.uk/about-re/



“I have found NATRE membership to be central to my understanding of RE in an ever-changing political climate. You are in touch with what is happening with your subject nationally as well as having plenty of resources support and opportunities to work within local networks to share and develop best practice. RE can be a tricky subject to navigate... the online help, excellent CPD and inspiring ideas from NATRE are invaluable.”

English legislation

RE is for all pupils

- Every pupil has a legal entitlement to RE.
- RE 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be provided for all registered pupils in state-funded schools in England, including those in the sixth form, unless withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over).¹
- 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’.²
- The ‘basic’ school curriculum includes the National Curriculum, RE, and relationships and sex education.³

RE is locally determined, not nationally

- A locally agreed syllabus is a statutory syllabus for RE, recommended by a local standing advisory committee for RE (SACRE) for adoption by a local authority.⁴
- 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.

RE is multifaith, and recognises the place of Christianity and the other principal religions in the UK. Non-religious worldviews are included

- The RE curriculum, drawn up by a SACRE or used by an academy or free school, ‘shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’.⁵ Contemporary guidance from the Government makes clear that the breadth of RE will include the six principal religions of the UK and non-religious worldviews.

1 School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Schedule 19; Education Act 2002, section 80.

2 The Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Consolidation) (Amendment) Regulations 2006, Regulation 5A.

3 Relationships and sex education, and health education will both become compulsory from 2020.

4 Education Act 1996, Schedule 31.

5 Education Act 1996, section 375.

Parental right of withdrawal from RE

This was first granted in 1944 when curricular RE was called '*Religious Instruction*' and carried with it connotations of induction into the Christian faith. RE is very different now – open, broad and exploring a range of religious and non-religious worldviews. In the UK, parents still have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to provide their own RE. This provision will be the parents' responsibility.⁶ 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.

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 wishes 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 to RE.

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
9. **You can download the full document for FREE by simply visiting: www.natre.org.uk/membership/guidance-on-withdrawal**
10. 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.



'I enjoy learning about other religions because it's interesting and good to know about other religions because it will come in useful one day'
pupil, age 10

⁶ School Standards and Framework Act 1998 S71 (3).