

Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education and Collective Worship Guidance

Introduction

This paper has been produced for use by the following SACREs: Durham, Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Sunderland. It gives some basic guidance for schools when dealing with requests from parents for withdrawal of their children from Religious Education and collective worship.

Rights of Parents and Responsibilities of Schools

All schools (including academies and free schools) must provide Religious Education (RE) and collective worship for all their pupils.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of RE and/or collective worship. When this happens, the school remains responsible for the supervision of the child and the health and safety of the child remains paramount. However, this should not incur extra cost to the school i.e. a child need not be supervised by a teacher or an assistant in a room on their own. It is usual for the child to be supervised in a library or study centre or with another class of pupils. SACRE does not recommend that children remain in the back of the RE classroom or assembly hall.

Parents do not need to give reasons for their request for the withdrawal of their child from RE and / or collective worship. Senior leaders may choose, however, to discuss their reasons with them. This helps avoid any misunderstanding there may be about the nature and purpose of RE and collective worship, including visits to faith communities and places of worship. (Note: RE and collective worship in schools are educational. RE must not be designed to convert pupils or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils).

Schools are not responsible for providing alternative provision, an alternative curriculum or extra work. The school should not incur any extra cost. For example, a parent cannot ask for extra English or Maths work to be given to their child. No extra marking should take place.

Parents do not have the right to withdraw their children from other curriculum subjects (with the exception of sexual education) even when they cover aspects of religions and beliefs. Parents cannot determine the nature of content in these subjects. For example, pupils may encounter some religious ideas, beliefs or practices through Art, Music, Geography, English, History. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from the teaching of Religious Education not the reference to religions in other curriculum areas.

Further Considerations

- The right of withdrawal from RE and collective worship remains with the parent and not the child (apart from pupils in sixth forms who can decide for themselves). It would not be acceptable for a child of any age to tell the school that they do not want to be in RE lessons or that their parents have told them to tell the school. Parents must communicate directly with the school.
- It cannot be assumed that parents will exercise the right to withdraw their child from *both* RE and collective worship. For example, parents may choose to withdraw their child from collective worship but may wish for them to remain in RE lessons as part of their formal curriculum entitlement.
- Schools should not make assumptions that parents with particular beliefs will want to withdraw their child from RE and or collective worship. It is also not the case that every child in a family may be withdrawn from RE and / or collective worship. It is the right of the parents to approach the school not the responsibility of the school to approach the parents (including sets of parents from particular year groups or faith positions).
- Schools should be aware of issues surrounding religion, race and culture and ensure that parental right of withdrawal requests do not hamper their responsibilities to ensure equality for all and the active promotion of fundamental British values.
- SACRE recommends that school leaders request that parents discuss their right of withdrawal on an annual basis. This is not statutory but does enable regular discussions.
- Teachers (including headteachers although they remain responsible for provision) also have a right to withdraw from collective worship and teaching of RE although some teachers in church schools do not have this right. For further guidance please contact SACRE.
- Whilst SACRE members support the legal right of parents to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship they fundamentally believe that participation in both is beneficial to children both in terms of their achievement and personal development. Good RE enables children to develop religious literacy by learning about the concept of religion, finding out about the beliefs and practices of a range of religions and beliefs and developing skills of critical evaluation, as appropriate. RE promotes the attitudes of respect and tolerance and gives opportunities for children to reflect on their own ideas, experiences, values and beliefs. RE should not promote or encourage a certain set of beliefs. Collective worship should be educational and for all, giving opportunities for children to reflect on shared human experiences and values within the school community. As such it makes a key contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all children. SACRE recommends that schools discuss the purpose of RE and collective worship with parents and also ensure that all staff within the school clearly understand the nature and purpose of what RE and Collective worship is and is not.