



Briefing Paper for Headteachers and those with responsibility for Religious Education in maintained schools who follow the locally Agreed Syllabus -

“Engaging with Religion and Worldviews”

Aide Memoire and Accompanying Letter Template/Suggestion for Senior Leaders on the parental right of withdrawal of students/children from Religious Education (RE) and its wider implications

The following guidance is issued in the light of national and local reports of a small number of parents requesting that their child is withdrawn from those parts of Religious Education which address Islam.

Parents have had the right, since 1944, to withdraw their child from Religious Education, Collective Worship or aspects thereof.

Parents are not required to provide reasons or justifications for these requests.

However, in order to clarify and maintain the educational value of RE and good relationships with parents, Headteachers/RE Co-ordinators are encouraged to seek opportunities to speak/meet with parents in order to listen to their concerns and questions. (These may sometimes be based on misunderstandings about the aims and objectives of RE)

It is clear from Parliamentary records that the right to withdraw was, and remains, intended as a conscience clause and not as a general opt out clause.

In addressing a request it must be made clear to parents that their child will need to be supervised in another classroom/Library (or same classroom); that neither the school nor (where applicable) the Local Authority must incur any additional costs as a result of this and that parents have a responsibility to provide alternative RE material/resources during the RE lesson time, according to their own wishes around religion/belief. This should be at a similar level with activities and assessment, as appropriate. The RE time cannot be used for other subjects or as a catch up time for a National Curriculum subject. This would not be legal.

In 2000 the DfES restated its advice from Circular 1/94 on its website:

Parents of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school have a right to withdraw their children from religious education (RE). If a parent asks for their child to be wholly or partly excused from attending any RE at the school the school must comply unless the request is withdrawn. A school remains responsible for the supervision of any child withdrawn from RE, unless the child is lawfully receiving religious education elsewhere. Parents do not need to explain their reasons for seeking withdrawal. The Department

recommends that to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher may wish to clarify with any parent wanting to withdraw:

- the religious issues about which the parent would object their child being taught
- the practical implications of withdrawal
- the circumstances in which it would be reasonable to accommodate parents' wishes
- if a parent will require any advanced notice of such RE and if so, how much.

SACRE would wish to endorse this advice in that if parents are going to understand their right in full they should have this explained to them by the school.

RE is a legal and statutory requirement, although RE is not part of the National Curriculum. (This is why withdrawal from RE is possible)

There are sound educational reasons for the inclusion of RE within the school curriculum and it should be demonstrated that RE makes a significant contribution to the main aims of the National Curriculum that are:

“Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils
- Prepares them, at school, for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life

From The National Curriculum in England: Framework document September 2013

Michael Gove, the previous Secretary of State for Education, wrote, in his Foreword to the *National Curriculum Framework for RE – 2013*:

“...All children need to acquire knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape their history and culture, but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.”

The new Plymouth syllabus, “Engaging with Religion and Worldviews”, that builds on the solid foundation of our previous syllabus, “Every Child Matters in RE”, ensures that this approach is at the heart of the teaching and learning of Religious Education in Plymouth.

It is, therefore, of concern that parents would be requesting to withdraw their children from these educational aims and opportunities.

Parents may need to see a policy on RE that outlines what is taught in the school.

It will be helpful to be able to say that the school can also provide details about the curriculum followed and that this is locally determined.

Plymouth state maintained schools follow national guidelines and a framework that emphasises the importance of RE as a subject which allows for full and open enquiry of Christianity and the other main religions and belief systems. (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Other belief systems will also be explored as the children grow and mature, e.g. Humanism.)

Through the RE syllabus, schools also seek to emphasise a local 'Plymouth' theme to their approach, encouraging children to explore the religious and cultural heritage and diversity of our city. This will help to prepare them for life in 21st century Britain and enable them to develop the values of acceptance and compassion based on understanding the equality of all and corresponding respect for all people, especially those with different faiths and beliefs.

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Withdrawal From RE – Template /Suggested Letter

Dear

Thank you for your letter of.....

I am fully aware of your legal right to withdraw..... from elements of the locally agreed RE syllabus under Section 71 of the Schools and Standards Framework Act 1998.

However I would ask you to carefully consider the following points before proceeding with your decision.

- The modern workplace and wider society, for which we are helping to prepare....., includes a diversity of cultures and faiths, all of which should be respected under the terms of the Equalities Act of 2010. The best way forto be fully prepared, in this sense, is to understand and have knowledge of the basic features, of all religions and cultures, including those with which some may disagree. (I attach a copy of our programme of study for your information)
- In order to fully reach his/her full potential,should be prepared and informed about modern British society which is, and always has been, made up of a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities.
- Religions may, at times, develop extremist and violent elements which claim to act in their name, and Islam is no different in this respect. Despite recent acts of terror carried out in its name, we know that Islam, as a faith, has no more place for such actions than do the other faiths that are part of British society.

Should you decide to proceed with your original decision however, you should be aware that:

1. The school is required by law only to provide adequate supervision and that it is expected that parents will provide an equivalent and alternative RE programme of study forto follow during the time that he/she is withdrawn from lessons. He/she cannot use this time to 'catch up' with other subjects.
2. In accepting your request the school is in no way endorsing your reasons for making it.

I hope you will reconsider your decision in the light of some of these points and allow.....the full, broad and balanced curriculum to which she/he is entitled and which he/she deserves.

Yours.....