

Religious Education the right to withdraw

Religion and belief have become more visible in public life in recent years, making it important that all pupils should have an opportunity to engage in RE. However, the parent of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over) may request that they be excused from all or part of the religious education (RE) provided.

Parents who wish to withdraw their children from RE should be aware of its aims and what is covered in the RE curriculum and that they are given the opportunity to discuss this if they wish. It should be made clear whether the withdrawal is from the whole RE curriculum or specific parts of it.

Important - limitations to withdraw

If pupils are withdrawn from RE, schools have a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching. A pupil may be required to work in another area of the school, such as another classroom.

Whilst parents or carers have a right to withdraw children from RE, they should note that children may also encounter religions and beliefs and wider aspects of faith in other areas of the curriculum from which there is no right of withdrawal.

On occasion, spontaneous questions about religious matters are raised by pupils or issues related to religion arise in other curriculum subjects such as history or citizenship (PSHE) For example, schools promote community cohesion and help pupils to understand ideas about identity and diversity, feelings and emotions within both religious and non-religious contexts.

Managing the Right of Withdrawal

If pupils are withdrawn from RE, schools have a duty to supervise them, though not to provide additional teaching or to incur extra cost. Pupils will usually remain on school premises where it is feasible and appropriate.

Where a request for withdrawal is made, the school must comply and excuse the pupil until the request is rescinded. Though not legally required, it is good practice for a head teacher to invite parents to discuss their written request.

(Section 71(3), School Standards and Framework Act 1998).