

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: PARENTS' RIGHT TO WITHDRAW THEIR CHILD



The law states that:

- If the parent asks that a pupil should be wholly or partly excused from receiving any religious education at the school, then the school must comply;
- As schools act in loco parentis, a school continues to be responsible for the supervision of any child withdrawn by its parents from RE unless the child is lawfully receiving religious education elsewhere;
- Withdrawal time should not be used to teach other curriculum areas e.g., additional mathematics sessions;
- If a parent so requests, and so long as the local authority is satisfied that this will not interfere with the child's attendance at school other than at the beginning or end of any school session, a pupil may be withdrawn from the school premises to receive religious education elsewhere of a kind which is not provided in the school during the *periods of time that the child is so excused*.

It should be noted that arranging alternative religious education is extremely rare.

- If a parent wishes their child to receive alternative religious education that cannot be provided elsewhere (as above), the school is required to allow such education within the school as long as it does not consider there are special circumstances in which it would be unreasonable to do so. **Any arrangement must not incur any extra cost for the school.** This usually would mean that parents could send in RE materials for the pupil to work on during RE lessons
- Students aged 18 or over have the right to withdraw themselves from RE and can do so without giving any explanation.

(School Standards and Framework Act, 1998)

How should a parent make the request?

- All requests should be made to the headteacher;
- The process should be clearly outlined on **the school website**;
- A written record should be made of the request, any discussion and the outcome.
- The request should be reviewed annually.

Can the headteacher ask the parent to reconsider?

- Parents considering withdrawal should be asked to contact the headteacher to arrange a discussion.
- The school can ask why the parent wishes to withdraw the child but cannot require a reason to be given;
- It is reasonable for the headteacher to explain the approach to religious education:
 - In Lancashire community and voluntary controlled schools RE is inclusive and explores what it means to be human;
 - It is not indoctrinating or nurturing children in a faith or promoting any particular belief system;
 - RE makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Can a parent withdraw their child (ren) from particular parts of RE rather than from the subject as a whole?

- Yes. However, the headteacher should explain that the aspect is important within the RE programme:
 - Visit to a place of worship: it should be made clear that the purpose is to find out about why, where and how worship takes place and is not to participate in worship. The school might consider whether the parent could be invited to accompany the group;
 - A faith visitor to school: parents, pupils and visitor should be clear that the purpose is to educate and learn about the experience of a person of faith, not for the visitor to attempt to proselytise;
 - A particular religion: this has to be challenged as it is disrespectful of a whole group of people and a disservice to the child's education. Headteachers should draw the parent's attention to the relevant school policy/policies supported by Lancashire Authority's policy on dealing with racism / racist incidents / Islamophobia / Antisemitism and the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus;
 - Schools must respect the requirements of some faith groups on such matters as the prohibition on pictorial depictions of God or not participating in Christmas activities.

Can children be withdrawn from other subjects when there is an element of religion in the programme?

- Generally not – for example, when studying the Catholic and Anglican churches in the Tudor period or a religion-inspired piece of music or art when the learning objectives relate to those subjects;
- However, if religious education is taught as part of an integrated programme the parental right must be respected when the learning objectives are those of religious education.

For further advice and case studies please refer to the NATRE guidance uploaded to the SACRE website on [Religious Education - LPDS Resources \(lancashire.gov.uk\)](http://lancashire.gov.uk)