

LDBE Guidance on withdrawal from Religious Education

This short guidance note is intended to support school leaders in navigating requests for withdrawal from religious education with clarity, confidence and care. It reflects recent legal developments following a Supreme Court ruling in Northern Ireland, which may have implications for Church schools more widely. While national policy remains unchanged at this time, this document provides an interim update and will be refreshed as further guidance becomes available.

The importance of religious education

The Statement of Entitlement 2026 details the expectations for religious education in Church of England schools. It is designed to help stakeholders place RE at the heart of a flourishing school.

In a Church school, RE should enable pupils to:

- Engage meaningfully and critically with learning which helps them to make sense of the multi-religious and multi-secular world in which they live.
- Know about and understand Christianity as a diverse global living faith through the exploration of beliefs and practices, using approaches which engage with biblical text and key sources of authority.
- Gain knowledge and understanding of a range of religious and non-religious worldviews, appreciating the complexity, diversity, continuity and change that exists within those worldviews being studied.
- Grapple with questions of meaning and purpose raised by human existence and experience.
- Understand the concept of religion and recognise its continuing influence on Britain's cultural heritage and in the lives of individuals, communities and societies in different times, cultures and places.
- Develop disciplinary knowledge which equips pupils to be religiously literate.
- Explore their personal worldviews; their own religious or non-religious, spiritual and philosophical ways of living, believing and thinking.

The Legal Framework for RE

Each Church of England school, whether VA, VC, or academy, has a legal duty to ensure that RE is taught in line with its trust deed.

In VA schools and in academies that were formerly VA schools, the syllabus and curriculum for RE is the responsibility of those in governance.^{1 2}

VC schools are required to follow the locally agreed syllabus. Academies that were formerly VC schools are required, as set out in their funding agreement, to ensure that the RE syllabus and curriculum adhere to the provisions of the locally agreed syllabus and meet the requirements of the school's trust deed.

In supporting parents and pupils aged 18 and over to make informed decisions, schools should ensure that families are able to understand the purpose, status and educational aims of religious education within a Church of England school, as set out in the Statement of Entitlement. Clear, consistent articulation of the aims, content and place of RE—grounded in the school's Christian vision and the legal framework—should be established as part of the school's normal communication and practice.

The right of withdrawal

No current legislation alters parents' existing rights to withdraw their children from RE if they wish. If the parent asks that a pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attending RE at the school, then the school must comply.^{2 3}

Pupils do not have an independent right to withdraw themselves from religious education. This right rests with parents until a pupil reaches the age of 18.^{1 2}

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 a pupil has been withdrawn, the law provides for alternative arrangements to be made for RE of the kind the parent wants the pupil to receive.²

Managing the withdrawal process

The use of the right to withdraw should be at the instigation of parents (or pupils themselves if they are aged 18 or over), and it should be made clear whether it is from the whole of RE or specific parts of it. No reasons need be given.

On receipt of the withdrawal request, headteachers should grant the request immediately, without imposing any additional burden on either parents or pupils as part of the decision making process. **Schools should make the ability to withdraw clear and straightforward not requiring justification or meetings to occur.**

¹ [Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010](#)

² [Religious Education \(RE\) and collective worship in academies and free schools](#)

³ [DfE Circular Number 1/94 Religious Education and Collective Worship](#)

While schools should not require discussion, they may offer a conversation for clarity or pastoral support, provided it is clear that this is optional and not a condition of the withdrawal consent. This may provide opportunity to explore how the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated.

School leaders are advised to note that this guidance reflects the current national position and will be updated as further clarification or changes to national policy are issued