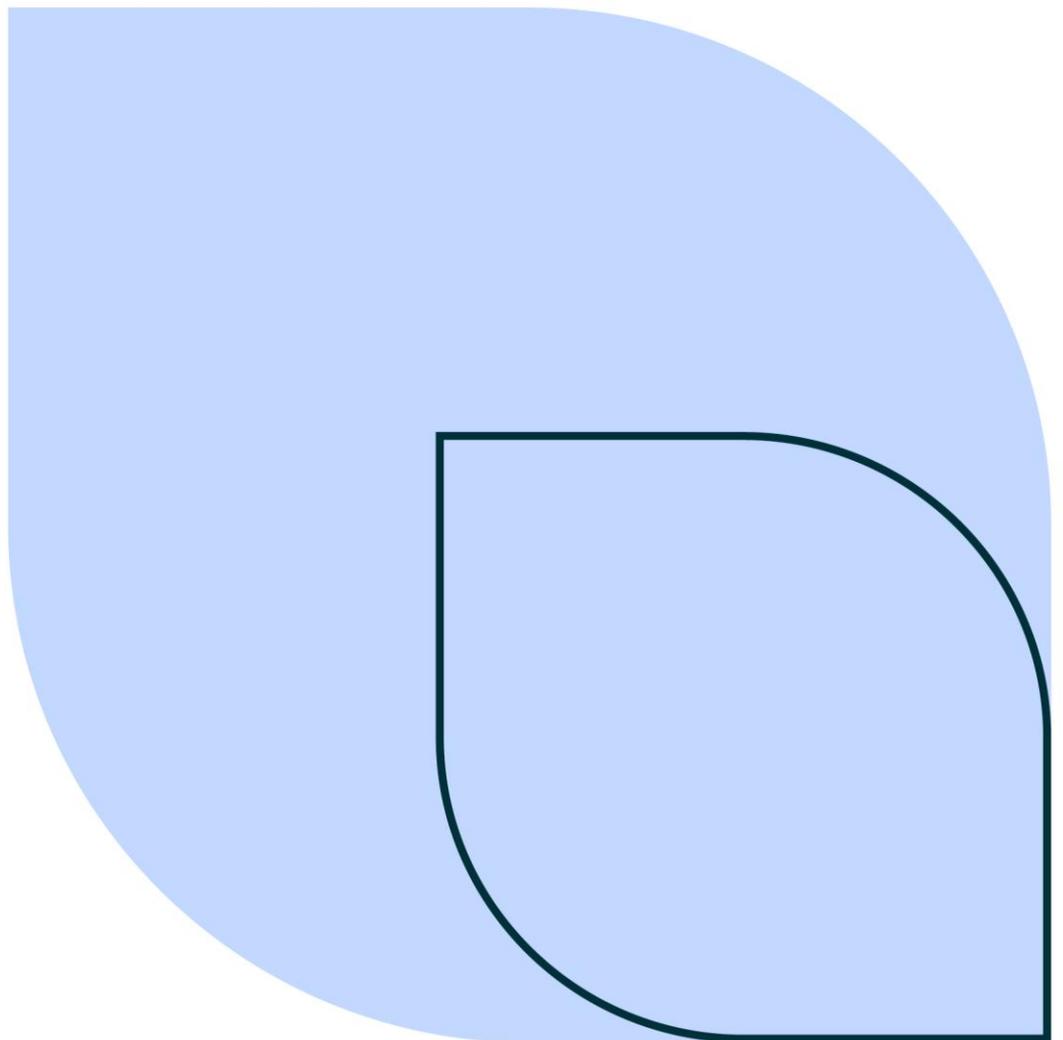


# Religious Education

## Supplementary Guidance for Dioceses

March 2026

Restricted to DBEs, DDEs, and diocesan advisers





## Supplementary Guidance on Managing Religious Education Provision

### [INTERNAL USE ONLY]

#### 1. Purpose of the Document

Religious Education (RE) is central to the education offered within a Church of England school. It is a statutory requirement for all schools.<sup>1</sup> The expectations for RE are outlined in the Statement of Entitlement for RE: [Curriculum: religious education – National Society for Education](#) It is expected that all pupils, in all statutory year groups (YR – 13) will receive RE teaching which meets these expectations.

Within the Statement of Entitlement, it is clear that RE must be ‘delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner’, ‘be non-confessional in nature’ and that ‘a range of religious and non-religious worldviews [are] to be studied’. It is intended that by following the Statement of Entitlement, Church schools will provide RE which is suitable for the vast majority of pupils.

As stated in the RE Statement of Entitlement, RE should enable all pupils in a Church school to:<sup>2</sup>

- 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.

RE is an important and meaningful academic discipline for all pupils, to enable them to gain knowledge, scholarly thinking and the religious literacy to engage with the world around them. Not studying RE has an impact on pupils, families and communities; schools must do all within their control to ensure RE is as accessible as possible for all pupils.

The law is also clear that there is a right of withdrawal from RE, which must be respected.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/281929/Collective\\_worship\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf) Religious Education and Collective Worship (1994)

<sup>2</sup> [NSE+RE+Statement+of+Entitlement+for+publication+January+2026.pdf](#) page 1

<sup>3</sup> Religious Education and Collective Worship (1994) page 17-19



This document aims to support dioceses in giving advice to Church schools about responding to any requests to withdraw a child from RE. It has been created in accordance with legal advice, to enable schools to navigate common issues that can arise in providing collective worship.

However, whilst it has been informed by legal advice, the guidance itself does not constitute legal advice. In specific cases where a legal position is required, this should be sought by the diocese in each context.

Please note, this document should be read alongside the parallel guidance on Collective Worship (2026).

## **2. The Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education**

### **2.1 Legal principles**

- A Church school has a legal duty to provide RE to its pupils according to the legal arrangements for their type of school (ie Voluntary Controlled, Voluntary Aided or Academy).
- A pupil can legally be withdrawn from RE by the person(s) who has/have parental responsibility (for a definition of ‘parental responsibility’ please see Appendix 1).
- A pupil in post-16 provision may withdraw themselves.
- The parents/ pupils (in post-16 provision) are not required to supply a reason for the withdrawal.<sup>4</sup>
- Withdrawal can be partial – i.e. from specific aspects of RE, such as the study of a particular religion or visit to a place of worship.
- Withdrawal from RE takes place during the school day and so pupils do not need to be at home to be withdrawn. Therefore, any absence related to avoidance of RE (i.e. parents/carers keeping their children at home to avoid an RE lesson or visit to a place of worship) should be recorded as an unauthorised absence, since it is unnecessary for the pupil to be kept at home during these times.
- The school is recommended to make alternative arrangements for any pupils who are withdrawn from RE. Please see Section 2.3 below for more details about these arrangements.
- In the case of a parental disagreement, one parent can still exercise the right to withdraw their child from RE. Please see Section 2.4 below for more details.
- The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires schools to ‘eliminate discrimination... advance equality... foster good relations.’<sup>5</sup> RE which is ‘objective, critical and pluralistic’ is well-placed to support the development of meaningful dialogue and respect within the school community – across faiths, worldviews, cultures and beliefs – and enables pupils to understand how to advocate for one another in creating a culture which eliminates discrimination and advances equality. Where possible, all pupils should have access to opportunities to learn about this, even if withdrawn from RE and must not be stigmatised by the act of withdrawal.

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<sup>4</sup> See ‘The parental right to withdraw a child from attending collective worship should be freely exercisable and a school must give effect to any such request. Parents are not obliged to state their reasons for seeking withdrawal.’ Circular 1/94 [Collective worship in schools.pdf](#) Page 21

<sup>5</sup> [Public sector equality duty - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



- The Supreme Court of Northern Ireland made a ruling relating to religious education within schools in Northern Ireland in November 2025 from which principles can be extrapolated both for religious education and collective worship in England (see also NSE Supplementary Guidance for Dioceses on CW, February 2026). The Supreme Court cited Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which states: “No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.”<sup>6</sup>
- The judgement uses the phrase ‘undue burden’ with regards to the process applied to the parents in this case which ‘deter[red] them from seeking withdrawal, and risked stigmatisation.’<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Procedures for withdrawal

- As a principle, the school should ensure that its RE is sufficiently ‘objective, critical and pluralistic’, and fully accessible for all its pupils. To learn more about this, please refer to: [Curriculum: religious education — National Society for Education](#)
- The school should ensure it has a clear policy and written procedures for handling a withdrawal request or parental complaint about RE which complies with the law. Clear procedures for both should be set out within the school’s RE Policy and made available to parents, e.g. through the school website and in curriculum information. Where multiple languages are spoken, translations of these documents should be made available where possible.
- In order not to place an ‘undue burden’ on parents (or the pupil if in post-16 provision), requests for withdrawal should be granted without question since parents/ pupils are not required to give a reason to exercise the right to withdraw.
- It is appropriate for a school to request this in writing, to avoid doubt at a later date.
- If appropriate, the school may wish to gather information from parents who have exercised their right to withdraw in order to understand any particular concerns about the RE provided within the school for evaluation purposes. However, care must be taken not to stigmatise or burden the parents in any way.
- Wherever possible, the school should find ways to communicate with parents/ carers about the value of RE and the approach taken within the school to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. For example, at Curriculum meetings or in induction booklets.
- When dealing with a withdrawal, the school should describe to the parents what alternative arrangements will be made for their child. It is important that good records are kept of the parent/carer(s)’ request and the associated actions in case of any challenges at a later date.

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<sup>6</sup> [In the matter of an application by JR87 and another for Judicial Review \(Appellant\) - UK Supreme Court](#)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*



### 2.3 Alternative Arrangements for Withdrawn Pupils

The National Society for Education (NSE) recommends that any pupils who have been withdrawn from RE should be provided with reasonable alternative arrangements. It is important to note that whilst the process of withdrawal must not place an 'undue burden' on the parents, neither should the withdrawal result in any additional cost or disruption to the school.<sup>8</sup>

Alternative arrangements should not be used as an opportunity for timetabling another curriculum subject (such as Maths or English), for interventions or 'catch up' work but where possible should ensure that the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural needs of the pupil(s) are attended to.<sup>9</sup> There is no requirement to provide alternative RE, for example study of a different religious or non-religious worldview instead.

The following principles should be adhered to in providing alternative arrangements for withdrawn pupils:

- The pupil(s) must be suitably supervised, but the school must not be burdened by the cost or disruption of providing alternative supervision arrangements. If necessary, the pupil can remain in the classroom but be given an alternative activity to undertake.
- Any alternative content should ideally have regard to the pupil(s)' SMSC development. It should not be a holding activity while the pupils wait. However, schools must not incur any cost or disruption to the education of other pupils in providing such alternative.
- Material can in theory be supplied by parents for this, although if that is the case, these must be checked for suitability by the school to ensure they do not contravene the school's policies or other duties (particularly safeguarding). This is only possible if it can be done without additional cost or disruption to the school.<sup>10</sup>
- Pupils withdrawn from RE visits should be supervised in the same way as any pupil(s) who do not attend other school trips. If it is not possible to do this (for example if the whole school takes part in the visit) due to insufficient staffing to supervise, the school will need to speak with the parents to make an alternative plan.

### 2.4 Withdrawal in the case of Parental Disagreement

In the instance of a parental dispute regarding withdrawal from RE (i.e. if one parent requests this, but the other parent disagrees), in the first instance the school must ascertain who has parental responsibility. Parental responsibility is joint and equal.<sup>11</sup> Legally, neither parent has a predominant right to choose a child's religious upbringing. Therefore:

- The school can accept a request for withdrawal from one parent or any other person with parental responsibility.

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<sup>8</sup> Circular 1/94 RE and [Collective worship in schools.pdf](#) Page 25

<sup>9</sup> See RE Today Spring 2026 page 83 for an excellent explanation why pupils with SEND need not be withdrawn from RE

<sup>10</sup> Circular 1/94 RE and [Collective worship in schools.pdf](#) Page 25

<sup>11</sup> See Collective Worship Guidance for Dioceses (2026) Appendix 1



- If the parents are separated, the school may wish to check that any other parent or person with parental responsibility is aware of the request. However, they must grant the request to withdraw in the first instance.
- If the other parent/person with parental responsibility wishes the child to continue to attend collective worship, this is for the parents to discuss and try and reach agreement. It is not the school's place to intervene since they are legally required to grant the request of the parent asking for the withdrawal. Schools cannot be expected to mediate between parents with regards to their decision-making processes
- Where possible, the voice of the child should inform these conversations, but schools should be very wary of situations where the child is expected to choose one parent over another. This will only increase the distress the child experiences within an already difficult situation.