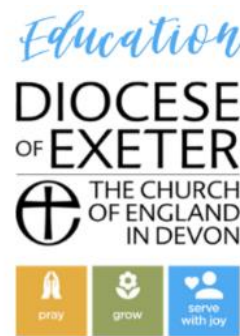


Exeter Diocesan Board of Education

Policy Statement and Guidelines

Parental right of withdrawal from Collective Worship and/ or Religious Education

Autumn 2026



To enable all, through the love of God in Jesus Christ, to 'live life in all its fullness' (John 10:10b)

Nurture vision-inspired education; **Nourish** personal and spiritual growth; **Enable** connected communities that **flourish**

*Within this document, any italicised text indicates a direct quotation from the relevant government guidance on the law relating to collective worship and to religious education. In the case of collective worship, this is **Circular 1/94: Religious Education and Collective Worship**; and in the case of religious education it is **Religious Education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010**. This guidance has been updated in light of JR87 Judicial Review and the NSE RE Statement of Entitlement.*

Collective Worship

Parents have been able to withdraw their children from collective worship since the 1944 Education Act and no recent legislation has affected this right. It is most recently confirmed in Section 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The government guidance document which remains current in the case of collective worship is **Circular 1/94: Religious Education and Collective Worship**.

Collective worship in a Church of England School should be in accordance with the tenets and practices of the Church of England. In other words, the law on collective worship in a community school, that it should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, does not apply in a church school, where it should be distinctively Christian.

The law states that in all maintained schools there must be a daily act of worship for all pupils, other than those in a nursery class or a nursery school. This can take place at any time during the school day and in any groupings.

In Church of England academies, collective worship should be conducted in accordance with the academy's funding agreement, religious designation and trust deed, and should reflect the school's Anglican foundation and Christian vision.

In many schools in the Diocese of Exeter there are significant numbers of children whose families are members of another faith and belief community, or who hold a non-religious worldview. It is the purpose and duty of every church school to be demonstrably distinctive as a Church of England school (or Church of England/ Methodist, or Church of England/ URC or Church of England/Catholic). In every one of these schools it is part of the mission of the church to welcome those of other faiths and beliefs, and of no faith. In most cases, the parents of these children will have chosen the school for their child, making a specific choice of the school because of the ethos and education it offers.

On occasions, the parent may make a request for their child to be withdrawn from collective worship.

The right of withdrawal from collective worship would normally be exercised through the physical withdrawal of the pupil from the place where the act of worship is taking place. Indeed the school could

insist that this is the way the right is to be implemented. If, however, both the parent and the school agree that the pupil should be allowed to remain physically present during the collective worship, but not take part in it, nothing in the law prevents this. Withdrawal from collective worship may be complete or relate to specific acts of worship, celebrations or services.

Experience suggests that, to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher will find it helpful to establish with any parent wanting to exercise the right of withdrawal:

- *the elements of worship in which the parent would object to the child taking part*
- *the practical implications of withdrawal*
- *whether the parent will require any advanced notice of such worship, and, if so, how much*

Where parents have withdrawn their children from collective worship and request religious worship according to a particular faith or denomination, the governors and head teacher will seek to respond positively to such requests providing:

- *such arrangements can be made at no additional cost to the school*
- *that the alternative provision would be consistent with the overall purposes of the school curriculum as set out in the Education Acts (see, for example, Part 6 of the Education Act 2002, and Circular 1/94)*

Pupils withdrawn from collective worship should be suitably supervised and provided with an appropriate alternative activity that supports their spiritual development, wherever reasonably practicable.

The Diocese of Exeter affirms the guidance provided, and notes that *if the parent asks that a pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attending any religious worship at the school, then the school must comply.* This means that a parent may, for example, request their child does not take part in a carol service when otherwise the child takes part in daily collective worship.

Religious Education

The expectations for RE in Church of England schools are set out in the National Society for Education Religious Education Statement of Entitlement (January 2026). RE must be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, be non-confessional in nature and include the study of a range of religious and non-religious worldviews. Information about the RE curriculum and teaching should be shared through the school's website and at parents/carers meetings.

Religious Education is an important academic discipline for all pupils. Through the study of Christianity and a range of religious and non-religious worldviews, RE develops religious literacy and enables pupils to engage intelligently and respectfully with the diverse world in which they live.

Parents have been able to withdraw their children from religious education since the 1944 Education Act and no recent legislation has affected this right. It is most recently confirmed in Schedule 19 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Current government guidance on Religious Education states: *Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over).*

Alternative arrangements for withdrawn pupils

Where pupils are withdrawn from RE, the school has a duty to supervise them but is not required to incur additional cost or significant disruption in doing so. Alternative arrangements should:

- provide suitable supervision;
- avoid stigmatising the pupil;
- where possible contribute to the pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- not routinely consist of additional English, mathematics, intervention or catch-up work;
- be compatible with the efficient education of other pupils.

Parents may offer materials for use during withdrawal periods, but the school retains responsibility for checking their suitability against safeguarding requirements and school policies.

In Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, Religious Education must be provided in accordance with the local Agreed Syllabus provided by the SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) of the local authority in which the school is situated. In academies which were formerly VC schools, this is normally also the case. *However, where the parent of any pupil at the school requests that RE is provided in accordance with the Trust Deed or religious designation of the school, the school should comply with the request.*

In Voluntary Aided (VA) schools (and academies which were formerly VA) the decision on the content of Religious Education rests with the Governing Body and should be in line with the Trust Deeds of the school. Normally, the governors agree to adopt the Diocesan Syllabus where one exists.

In **academies**, the requirement to include RE as part of the broad and balanced curriculum is included in the academy funding agreement. For all academies, there is a requirement that RE must be taught to all pupils in full-time education and that it must meet the same requirements a locally agreed syllabus must meet, that is, the fact that “the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain” (Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996). However, academies do not have to base the RE curriculum on a locally agreed syllabus.

In all forms of church school, the Religious Education provided should contribute to the Christian character of the school, while avoiding being confessional¹. This is an aspect of the school's work which is subject to Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS), whether VA, VC or academy.

As in the case with collective worship, it is the duty of all our church schools to demonstrate their distinctiveness through the content of the Religious Education offered. Schools may encounter individual families, or possibly larger groups within the community of the school, who request that their children are withdrawn from RE because they are members of another faith and belief community, or because they hold a non-religious worldview.

We wish our schools to be inclusive communities but recognise that parents have the legal right to withdraw their children from religious education on the grounds of conscience. *However, the right of withdrawal does not extend to other areas of the curriculum when, as may happen on occasion, spontaneous questions on religious matters are raised by pupils or there are issues related to religion that arise in other subjects such as history or citizenship* (Non-statutory Guidance 2010). The Diocese of Exeter

¹ Confessional RE is characterised by the expectation that young people should adopt the Christian faith

affirms this guidance in cases where for example Christmas or another Christian festival is a theme for work produced by children in other subjects. The guidance makes clear that no parent has a right to withdraw their child from such activities.

Parents have a legal right to withdraw their child from all or part of Religious Education. Parents are not required to give reasons for their request. Schools may offer an opportunity for discussion to ensure that parents are fully informed about the RE curriculum and the implications of withdrawal, but any request must be respected and processed without creating an undue burden on parents. Requests for full or partial withdrawal from RE should be made formally to the headteacher, preferably in writing.

The school recognises the rights of parents and pupils under human rights legislation and will ensure that withdrawal procedures are accessible, fair and do not create unnecessary barriers.

Managing the right of withdrawal

The school will ensure that parents who want to withdraw their children from RE are aware of the RE syllabus being taught in the school and that it is relevant to all pupils and respects their own personal beliefs. The school may review withdrawal arrangements periodically in discussion with parents, provided that such review does not place pressure on parents to justify or reconsider their decision.

Withdrawal may be from all RE provision or from specific elements only, such as the study of a particular religion, a visit to a place of worship, or another identified aspect of the curriculum.

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 the subject or specific parts of it. No reasons need be given.

Parents have the right to choose whether or not to withdraw their child from RE without influence from the school, although a school should ensure that parents or carers are informed of this right and are aware of the educational objectives and content of the RE syllabus. In this way, parents can make an informed decision.

Information about RE, collective worship and the legal right of withdrawal should be made available to parents during induction and through published school policies and the website.

Where a request for withdrawal is made the school leadership should offer an opportunity to discuss the educational implications and practical arrangements arising from withdrawal. However, the law makes clear -

Where parents have requested that their child is withdrawn, their right must be respected, and where RE is integrated in the curriculum, the school will need to discuss the arrangements with the parents or carers to explore how the child's withdrawal can be best accommodated. Where parents disagree about withdrawal from RE, the school will determine whether the person making the request holds parental responsibility. A request from one person with parental responsibility is sufficient for withdrawal to take effect. Schools may make the other parent aware of the request, where appropriate, but schools are not expected to arbitrate or mediate disputes between parents regarding withdrawal requests.

Where possible, the child's views should be considered in an age-appropriate manner.

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. This RE could be provided at the school in question, or the pupil could be sent to another school where suitable RE is provided, if this is reasonably convenient.

Withdrawal from Religious Education occurs during the school day. Parents should not keep pupils at home to avoid participation in RE lessons or visits. Any such absence should normally be recorded in accordance with attendance regulations as an unauthorised absence.

If neither approach is practicable, outside arrangements can be made to provide the pupil with the kind of RE that the parent wants, and the pupil may be withdrawn from school for a reasonable period of time to allow them to attend this external RE. In practice, schools are not required to provide alternative RE where this would result in additional cost or disruption to the school. Suitable supervised alternative arrangements will normally be sufficient.

Outside arrangements for RE are allowed as long as the LA is satisfied that any interference with the pupil's attendance at school resulting from the withdrawal will affect only the start or end of a school session. (Non-statutory Guidance 2010).

Schools are advised to request withdrawal applications in writing and maintain appropriate records of requests and resulting arrangements. This provides clarity for parents and schools and supports future continuity should staff change

The right of withdrawal and duty to promote British values

Schools need to ensure that parental right of withdrawal requests do not hamper their responsibilities to provide equality for all and the active promotion of fundamental British values. However, it needs to be noted that teaching pupils to respect people of other faiths and beliefs should not be limited to RE or collective worship sessions.

British values and SMSC should be embedded throughout a broad and balanced curriculum, as well as in the school's ethos and vision. Schools must continue to fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. RE delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner contributes significantly to fostering mutual respect, advancing equality and promoting positive relationships across people of different faiths, beliefs and worldviews.

It is suggested that information about the school's ethos and vision and its SMSC provision should be published on the school website.

Other issues

From time to time issues may arise which are outside the scope of the parental right of withdrawal from RE and collective worship. These include, for example, certain aspects of requirements under the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate because of race, religion or belief. Where an issue arises from, for example, a uniform policy that requires pupils to dress (or not to dress) in a way that conflicts with a genuine requirement of their religion or belief, schools are advised, if necessary and appropriate, to explore with the parents of the pupils involved the nature of their concerns. The school could then consider the possible scope for flexibility in the application of the policy, seeking guidance as necessary from the Diocese.

Schools should take reasonable steps to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged, isolated or stigmatised as a consequence of withdrawal.

Any concerns regarding Religious Education or Collective Worship (CW) provision should normally be addressed through the school's complaints procedure. A concern or complaint about RE/CW is distinct from the legal right of withdrawal, which remains available to parents at any time.

Approval	Policy implemented	Policy review date
Reviewed by the DBE Committee's Standards and Ethos Group	03/10/2025	Autumn 2027
Reviewed by the DBE Committee's Standards and Ethos Group	Autumn 2026	Autumn 2028

Appendix 1 – Checklist of procedures for withdrawal for Schools

- The school should ensure it has a clear policy and written procedures for handling a withdrawal request or parental complaint about RE/CW which complies with the law.
- Clear procedures for both should be set out within the school's RE/CW 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/CW 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/CW 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 and on the school's website.
- 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.
- 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.
- There is no requirement to provide alternative RE, for example study of a different religious or non-religious worldview instead.
- 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 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.
- 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.

Responsibilities of schools

Schools will:

- respect lawful requests for withdrawal
- provide appropriate supervision
- avoid placing undue burden on parents
- maintain appropriate records
- ensure pupils are not disadvantaged or stigmatised
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Responsibilities of parents

Parents should:

- notify the school of withdrawal requests, preferably in writing
- indicate whether withdrawal is full or partial
- engage with information provided by the school about practical arrangements
- support agreed arrangements for their child during withdrawal periods

Schools should contact a member of the education team education@exeter.anglican.org for support with formal communications with parents/carers who make a withdrawal request. Support is available to schools regarding any aspects of this guidance and requests that are made.