

Collective Worship and Religious Education: a guide for governors

All schools have a duty to provide both RE and collective worship. RE is an academic subject area and part of the school curriculum. Collective worship represents a powerful way to develop and establish a school's ethos and values.

Policy regarding RE is found in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Schedule 19, the Education Act 2002, s80, and reiterated in the National Curriculum Framework 2013, para 2.3. The law states that all maintained schools must provide religious education for all registered pupils, and promote their spiritual, moral and cultural developments. Policy for collective worship is found in the Education Reform Act 1988, with guidance taken from DfE circular 1/94 (1994) which states that all maintained schools must provide daily collective worship for all registered pupils.

The RE curriculum must reflect the fact that religious traditions in the country are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions. Agreed Syllabuses must be periodically reviewed.

Collective worship in maintained schools and academies of no religious designation must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, though not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from both RE and collective worship.

Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) are local bodies representing faith groups, teachers and the Local Authority (LA) that advise on both the RE curriculum and collective worship.

Religious Education

Legal requirements: RE is a statutory subject of the school curriculum for all pupils aged between 5 and 19, unless withdrawn by parents, or, if over 18, the students themselves. ALL schools must provide RE in line with the National Curriculum requirement to offer a curriculum which is 'balanced and broadly-based' (National Curriculum, DfE, 2013, p. 4).

Maintained schools and academies without a religious designation are governed by the legal requirements for RE in non-faith schools, which covers its statutory nature, and where the RE syllabus derives from. In maintained schools, the RE curriculum will be derived from the locally agreed syllabus established by the local SACRE. Academies must deliver RE, in line with their legal obligations set out in their funding agreement, but are not compelled to use their locally agreed syllabus. They may do so, or they may use another agreed syllabus, or they may commission one.

RE should reflect the religious traditions of Britain which are, in the main, Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions in Britain.

In schools of a religious character, the RE curriculum will be derived from the faith community which has oversight for the school. However, Ofsted inspectors may comment on the educational value or teaching and learning approaches of RE in faith schools. Faith schools should still view educational RE as separate from collective worship, even if RE in the curriculum has a confessional flavour. In school the subject requires age-appropriate textual analysis, evaluation and critique, and thus is different to an act of collective worship.

Right of withdrawal: In all schools, parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE on the grounds that they wish to provide their own religious education. This will be the parents' responsibility. Teachers also have the right to withdraw.

National non-statutory guidance: Despite RE in the curriculum being determined locally, there is national guidance in the form of the National Curriculum Framework for RE (2013). This was compiled by the RE Council for England and Wales to offer support in meeting the legal requirements for the subject, and to offer a curriculum which is rigorous, relevant and meaningful. It represents a good snapshot of current thinking on the subject. It can be found in this document:

<http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/2013%20Review%20of%20Religious%20Education%20in%20England.pdf>

Collective worship

Legal requirements: All schools must provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The aim of collective worship is to develop pupils socially, morally, spiritually and culturally. The 1994 legal framework documentation regarding collective worship still stands. Added to this is the recent requirement to promote British values as part of SMSC (Ofsted, September 2014, DfE, November 2014).

Free schools and academies have the same requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship as maintained and faith schools, as part of their funding agreement.

Some schools struggle with the requirement that collective worship is broadly Christian. Some community schools will request a 'determination' if their school has a clearly defined non-Christian religious community. Maintained schools apply to their local SACRE and academies apply directly to the Secretary of State to request a change of determination. A determination can lift the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1988 that collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' and usually lasts five years.

Collective worship is about a school's duty to develop pupils spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. This may include learning about interesting cultural traditions and their meaning, listening to stories with a moral message and reflecting on themes such as strength, courage or loyalty. Collective worship should draw pupils' attention to the values the school wishes to develop both as a body and in each individual. Collective worship is about the growth of the person, their character and social outlook, whatever their academic aptitudes.

Right of withdrawal: the right of withdrawal from collective worship stands for all parents and teachers. Some people argue that the daily act of collective worship is not an appropriate educational requirement for schools. The detail of the guidance in Circular 1/94 about the nature of such collective worship does not represent the law. However this requirement would have to be tested in law, which has not yet been done. The 2013 report by Essex SACRE explores this possibly contentious issue. Read the full report:

http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Partners/Schools/Essex-Grid-Learning/Schools/curriculum-resources/Documents/Collective_Worship_in_Schools.pdf