

A Parent's Right To Withdraw or Partially Withdraw Their Child From Religious Education

Parents in England have the legal right to withdraw their children from all or part of religious education (RE) lessons and collective worship.

Legal Basis and Scope

Parents are legally entitled under Section 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to request that their child be excused from RE lessons or acts of collective worship, either wholly or partially, without needing to provide a reason (tmaschool.com). This right applies to all pupils in state-funded schools, including academies, free schools, and schools with or without a religious designation (gov.uk). Pupils aged 18 or over can choose to withdraw themselves from RE.

Partial Withdrawal

Parents can request withdrawal from specific parts of RE, such as lessons on a particular religion or visits to places of worship, while allowing their child to participate in other aspects of the curriculum. Schools may explain the educational importance of certain activities, but they cannot override the parental right to withdraw.

School Responsibilities

When a child is withdrawn, schools must supervise them but are not required to provide alternative teaching or incur extra costs. Pupils usually remain on school premises, such as in a library or study area. Schools may discuss the request with parents to clarify practical arrangements and ensure the child's education continues smoothly.

Limitations

Withdrawal only applies to RE lessons and collective worship. Children may still encounter religious content in other subjects, such as history, art, or PSHE, where there is no legal right to withdraw (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education guidance). Schools should establish which aspects of RE the parent objects to and discuss reasonable accommodations.

Procedure

Parents should submit a written request to the headteacher, which should be recorded and reviewed annually. We recommend discussing concerns with the Head Teacher before formal withdrawal. If parents wish, alternative RE can sometimes be arranged outside school hours, but this is rare and must not incur extra cost.

In summary, parents have a clear statutory right to withdraw their children from RE lessons or collective worship, either fully or partially, and schools are legally obliged to respect this request while supervising the child appropriately.