



Chief Executive  
Andrew Travers

Wandsworth Borough Council  
**Chief Executive's Group**  
6th Floor, Town Hall Extension,  
Wandsworth High Street,  
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Date: 16th January 2026

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## **STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**MONDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 P.M.  
ALDERBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL, OLDRIDGE ROAD,  
LONDON, SW12 8PP**

### **SACRE Membership:**

**Group A – Religious denominations other than the Church of England – namely Christian and other denominations, religions and world views which appropriately reflect the principal faith traditions and belief systems in Wandsworth:**

Mr Dominique Joseph Clem (Seventh-day Adventist Church), Ms Sharon Coussins (Wimbledon Synagogue), Ms Saffi Haines (Society of Friends), Rev. Pete Herbert-James (Balham Baptist Church), Dr Lottie Holmes (Humanists UK), Mrs Maria Liddy (Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark), Imam Hamzah Patel (Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre), Dr Laow Panyasiri (Buddhapadipa Temple), Mr Paul Phillips (Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is), Mr Anup Saggar (Garrett Lane Mandir – Hindu Society) Mr Usman Shazhad Butt (Ahmadiyya Muslim Association), Mr Charan Singh (Khalsa Centre Gurdwara) and Mr Harbans Singh Mehta (Khalsa Centre Gurdwara).

**Group A Substitute:** Ms Shanta Chellappoo-Phillips (Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is).

### **Group B – Church of England:**

Rev. Susan Bolen, Mr Shaun Burns and Miss Sharon Cunningham.

### **Group C – Teachers' Associations:**

Mrs Claire Beecher (NEU), Ms Clare Hewitson (NEU), Ms Anna Madden (NAHT) and Ms Jan Sharp (NASUWT).

**Group D – Local Authority:**

Councillor Jo Rigby (Chair), Councillor Mrs Rosemary Birchall, Councillor Clare Fraser and Councillor Angela Graham.

**Co-opted members:** Ms Ruhena Bakhsh (Burntwood School), Ms Brigitte Sayers-Eugster (Shaftesbury Park Primary School).

## **AGENDA**

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

To receive any apologies for absence.

**2. Minutes - 3rd November 2025**

**(Pages 5 - 10)**

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of the SACRE held on 3rd November 2025 and to consider any matters arising.

**3. Membership**

To receive a verbal update on the membership of the SACRE.

**4. SACRE annual report 2024/25**

**(Pages 11 - 24)**

To consider the SACRE Annual Report for 2024/25 (attached).

**5. RE Curriculum and Assessment Review**

**(Pages 25 - 36)**

To discuss the recent review (abridged version of the report attached regarding RE) and watch part of a related video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DS0SoZiQ-I>

The full report can be found on:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment\\_Review\\_final\\_report\\_-\\_Building\\_a\\_world-class\\_curriculum\\_for\\_all.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report_-_Building_a_world-class_curriculum_for_all.pdf)

**6. Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) guidance**

**(Pages 37 - 70)**

To discuss the updated draft Wandsworth subject guidance (attached briefing paper).

**7. Northern Ireland RE Supreme Court ruling (Pages 71 - 76)**

To discuss the recent Supreme Court ruling (information attached).

**8. Proposed public Faith Trails update (Pages 77 - 78)**

To receive an update on the proposed public trails (attached).

**9. Future meeting dates**

The forthcoming SACRE meetings scheduled for 2026 and early 2027 have not been confirmed yet. Dates will be shared as soon as possible.

All meetings of the SACRE start at 7.30pm.

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Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education  
held at the Town Hall, Wandsworth High Street, Wandsworth, SW18 2PU  
on Monday, 3rd November, 2025 at 7.30 p.m.

Group A – Religious denominations other than the Church of England – namely Christian and other denominations, religions and world views which appropriately reflect the principal faith traditions and belief systems in Wandsworth:

Mr Dominique Joseph Clem (Seventh-day Adventist Church)

Ms Sharon Coussins (Wimbledon Synagogue)

Ms Saffi Haines (Society of Friends)

Rev. Pete Herbert-James (Balham Baptist Church)

Dr Lottie Holmes (Humanists UK)

Mrs Maria Liddy (Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark)

Imam Hamzah Patel (Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre)

Mr Paul Phillips (Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is)

Mr Usman Shazhad Butt (Ahmadiyya Muslim Association).

Group B – Church of England:

Rev. Susan Bolen

Miss Sharon Cunningham.

Group C – Teachers' Associations:

Ms Clare Hewitson (NEU)

Ms Anna Madden (NAHT).

Official Group D – Local Authority:

Councillor Jo Rigby (Chair),

Councillor Rosemary Birchall

Councillor Angela Graham.

**In attendance:**

Mr Andy Hough, Assistant Director of School Participation and Performance,

Ms Dianne Jones, Voluntary Sector Strategy and Partnership Manager (items 1-7)

Mrs Angela Rundle, SACRE Officer,

Mrs Ruth Wright, Democratic Services Officer.

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs Claire Beecher (NEU),

Mr Shaun Burns (Southwark Diocesan Board of Education),

Councillor Clare Fraser,

Ms Brigitte Sayers (Shaftesbury Park Primary School),

Ms Jan Sharp (NASUWT),

Mr Charan Singh (Khalsa Centre Gurdwara),

Mr Harbans Singh Mehta (Khalsa Centre Gurdwara).

## 2. Minutes - 9th June 2025

**RESOLVED** – it was unanimously agreed that the minutes of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education meeting held on 9th June 2025 were a correct record.

## 3. Membership

Mrs Wright stated that Ms Jyotika Pandya (Hindu Education Board UK) and Rev. Rosamund Hollingsworth (the Methodist Church of Great Britain) had stepped down from SACRE. Dr Laow Panyasiri (Buddhpadipa Temple) and Rev. Pete Herbert-James (Balham Baptist Church) had joined.

Mrs Wright asked that if members wished to join the SACRE WhatsApp group, they email her their mobile number. The group was another way of sharing information but does not replace email communications.

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## 4. NASACRE conference presentation

Members viewed a very short presentation by Lord Khan of Burnley, which had been shown at the most recent National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) conference. In it he described the importance of interfaith relations and studying religious education, for the benefit of children and the whole of society.

## 5. Introduction regarding Multi-Faith Forum

Ms Jones provided an overview of her role and that of her team. The team's main remit was to oversee and deliver the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy, working with the sector to aid connections and provide support as necessary to help them thrive and assist with volunteer placements. She added that relationships and residents' voices were key to the work of the team. The wider Communities and Partnerships Team also included the Grants Team who managed the Wandsworth Grant Fund and administered other grants such as Cost of Living Grant.

The VCS Team support the council to link with the Multi-Faith Forum, many of whom are also SACRE members. The Forum meets a few times a year, chaired by the Mayor and the Leader also attends. The last meeting was widened out to new members and the forum was hoping to hold a multi-faith event the following year, e.g. a choir or music concert that will be supported by the council. It was envisaged that as the Forum becomes more established, there would be more opportunities for joint initiatives with SACRE.

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## 6. Faith Trails update and open days

Mrs Rundle explained that trails took place in the latter part of the summer term and a further five in the autumn term covering the Balham, Wimbledon, Tooting and Southfields areas. She added that various schools had been involved, including several with large year groups. It was agreed that the trails were as much an education for the teachers and the children's families as for the children themselves.

Mrs Rundle reported that whilst the trails were well managed and positively received by the children, teachers and faith representatives, there had been one parental complaint. She added that the complaint had been investigated and found to have occurred due to a mis-understanding at a place of worship. The complaint had been responded to directly, but also guidance for the trails had been updated as a result of the issue raised, and Mrs Rundle had attended several of the talks at the sites.

One further issue was raised by Mrs Rundle regarding the trails, as twice a faith leader had to pull out at short notice. This caused problems with the trail, as it was the second of the three sites to visit on the day, causing scheduling difficulties. This situation occurred once when Ms Hewitson was escorting a group and she was able to step in and provide information about the location using knowledge from a previous trail visit. As a result of possible future scheduling concerns, Mrs Rundle would make changes to the specific trail order.

A full report on the trails would be provided at the end of the academic year. Mrs Rundle thanked the teachers and representatives involved in the trails.

There was also some discussion on whether a faith trail could be convened for secondary school-aged students. Mrs Rundle explained that because of the larger year groups in secondary schools, it would not be possible to accommodate them all on a trail in the same way as occurred with a primary school with 30 or 60 children per year.

Following past SACRE discussions about the possibility of opening places of worship for the public, specifics and logistics were discussed further. These included whether to have a set day for open visits or a led trail. It was decided that a walking trail would be explored for the spring and a different second route in the autumn covering four or five places of worship on a local geographical basis. Mrs Rundle offered to liaise with representatives to secure placements and a suitable date, as well as ensuring accessibility needs could be accommodated as best as possible. A shared or secular venue could be used for faiths/world views that did not have their own premises. The Council's Communication Team would be involved in publicising the event and Ms Jones offered to link with Parent Champions and others to promote it too.

For security and logistical reasons, it was agreed that booking was essential, though the event would be free. It was agreed that participants could join at any point in the trail, which was expected to last a couple of hours in total. Rev. Bolen described a Merton trail that she was involved in, with participants spending 20 minutes at each site. Ms Haines spoke of a guided walk organised by the Quakers visiting various Quaker Meeting Houses and included rest sites

in local cafes. Mrs Rundle stated that she would provide more information at the next SACRE meeting.

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## 7. Faith Direct update

Mrs Rundle read parts of a report she had written on the event that occurred on 21st October (included in these minutes, as was not ready when the agenda was created). 97 of the expected 100 students, mainly Years 8 and 9, attended. One school did not attend, as their teacher was ill, but another school brought an extra 10 students, so almost all seats were taken. 16 representatives were present covering 10 faith/world views, who led discussions for 14 minutes for each group of 10 students.

The feedback from the teachers, students and faith/world views representatives was positive and echoed the comments made by Lord Khan in his speech. The students were engaged and asked good questions, especially when accompanied by their teacher. The Council Leader opened the session and the Mayor closed it, after spending about an hour listening to various discussions.

Some teachers had asked if the event could start earlier, so consideration would be given for next year's event to start 30 minutes earlier, at 1pm. This would enable the students to be in school for the morning, and still allow the representatives to have lunch together. Another suggested consideration was to have water available for the students and tea and coffee for the teachers.

It was agreed that the event provided rounded coverage of many religions and world views and it was a chance for students to speak to representatives first hand. Although the same religions and world views were included in the locally agreed syllabus, the event facilitated interaction with those that may not be covered within the school's teaching, especially GCSE courses which tended to cover Christianity and Islam or Judaism. The event was attended by secular schools and faith schools and academies, who did not have to follow the syllabus. Mrs Rundle advised that Chestnut Grove Academy hold their own mini Faith Direct event in their school, with various faith and world view representatives attending.

Thanks were given to Mrs Rundle and Mrs Wright for their work on the event.

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## 8. Ofsted, SIAMS and CSI reports for 2024-25

Mrs Rundle provided an additional Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) report for Our Lady of Victories Catholic Primary School, which was shared just before the meeting (and included with these minutes). She explained that the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) and CSIs provided more information about a school than Ofsted reports, in terms of their ethos and school life, not just religious elements.

Ms Madden described how the CSI process went for her school. They had a one-year lead in time to hone elements required for the inspection. The governors spent time self-evaluating and focussing on strengths and weaknesses. The CSI inspectorate gave one day's notice for their visit and the school community, including the children were then informed. Ms Madden said that information on what would be explored was given in advance, nevertheless, their visit was gruelling and extensive. The inspectors spoke to pupils, parents/carers, staff, governors and the parish priest. In addition, the Inspectorate sent surveys to parents/carers to complete anonymously. There was a deep dive into RE, prayer, liturgy and curriculum.

The usual CSI cycle was 3 or 4 years, but the pandemic skewed recent timelines.

The CSI report provided a one-word judgement on three areas of school life – Catholic life and mission, religious education and collective worship, together with an overall score. SIAMS provided a more narrative judgement. There were comparisons with the CSI and SIAMS approaches to those used by The Association of Muslim Schools UK and The Jewish Schools' Religious Education Inspectorate (Pikuach).

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## **9. SACRE reflection resources from NASACRE (part 2)**

Mrs Rundle provided a compilation of the feedback from the workshop session at the last SACRE meeting where the NASACRE sheets were used. The sheets covered 'What does quality RE look like?' 'What do we want pupils to gain from their experience of RE?' and 'What can schools gain from effective RE?'. There were agreements in what was stated, in that lessons needed to be well taught and cover a range of faiths and world views.

One element that Mrs Rundle picked up with the RE subject leaders meeting was cross-curricular work, linking RE themes within other subjects. Mr Hough answered a question about the forthcoming National Curriculum report, by saying that RE was expected to remain a compulsory subject. There was some discussion on the role of SACRE nationally, especially in areas with little faith diversity. Members mentioned that there were some good faith and Humanist resources available to assist with ensuring a range of faiths and world views could be taught well in any school.

**RESOLVED** – details noted for information.

## **10. Future meeting dates**

**RESOLVED** – the next scheduled meeting was noted as being on:

- Monday 26th January 2026 at Alderbrook Primary School, Oldridge Road, London, SW12 8PP.

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.

**Wandsworth Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)**  
**Annual Report for the academic year September 2024- August 2025**

## 1. Introduction

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### Chair's welcome

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this report for the 2024-25 academic year as the Chair of Wandsworth SACRE. We had three meetings during the year, one of which was at the Town Hall and two hosted at places of worship, Balham Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Buddhapadipa temple, where we enjoyed presentations and a tour.

We welcomed new members this year – in Group A: Mr Anup Saggar (Hindu Society) and in Group C: Mrs Jan Sharp, Ms Ruhena Bakhsh and Ms Brigitte Sayers- Eugster.

We also said goodbye to some members this year – in Group A, Mr Nabhinandan Das and Ms Jyotika Pandya (Hindu), Rev. Rosamund Hollingsworth (Methodist) and Mr Colin Perry (Buddhist); and in Group B, Ms Rachel Croft.

Wandsworth SACRE has continued with its work to ensure that all pupils in our schools develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally as well as academically. We participated in the NASACRE AGM and conference and continue to follow with interest developments in RE nationally; for example, we were interested to see what Ofsted thought of the state of RE in its “Deep and Meaningful?” report and look forward to delving into the relevant parts of Professor Becky Francis’s led Curriculum and Assessment Review. We continue to support the Wandsworth syllabus to encourage a Worldviews approach, noting the findings of Stephen Pett’s handbook, “Developing a Religion and Worldviews approach in Religious Education in England”.

Our SACRE actively seeks to ensure all children in Wandsworth have access to high quality and challenging RE and we provide support to primary RE subject leaders through the teachers’ network meetings. These are free of charge to maintained schools and we urge school leaders to recognise the importance of

allocating school time for staff to attend. We also produce a termly newsletter which signposts resources, draws attention to issues of interest in the RE world and highlights forthcoming festivals among other features.

Pupils' learning in RE has continued to be enhanced by the Faith Trails which have allowed our children to experience exciting learning opportunities while promoting an ethos of respect for others. We are very grateful to our Group A members who have facilitated these. The trails have built on pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures and beliefs while also celebrating the religious and cultural diversity found in Wandsworth. Secondary students are able once more to meet a range of local faith leaders on the same day as part of "Faith Direct" and ask them any faith related questions they wish.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to members of Wandsworth SACRE and all others who work so hard to support RE in Wandsworth.

Councillor Jo Rigby  
Chair, Wandsworth SACRE

## Overview

1. This annual report of Wandsworth SACRE outlines the work of SACRE during the academic year 2024 to 2025. The GCSE and A-level statistics for Religious Studies for the past year are provided as an appendix to this report, with thanks to the Wandsworth Research and Evaluation Unit, which provides this information.

### Meetings held in the reporting year

2. Wandsworth SACRE met on three occasions during the academic year 2024 – 2025. Meetings were held in the evenings. One meeting was held at the Town Hall and two at places of worship; these were at Balham Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Buddhapadipa Buddhist temple, Wimbledon Parkside. Each of these meetings was preceded by a tour and presentation. This was by a member of SACRE at the church and the senior monk at the temple.

Attendance was generally good, and no meetings were inquorate. New members were welcomed, as listed above. There were five resignations and four new members, two of whom were co-optees.

3. The NASACRE briefing is a standing item at all SACRE meetings.

### Autumn Term Meeting 2024

4. Meeting held on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024

This was a very full meeting, as the agenda for the meeting, due to have been held the previous June but cancelled due to its proximity to the general election, had been added to the usual items for the autumn meeting.

A short remembrance was held for Lesley Prior, who had been our adviser until her final illness.

The Ofsted monitoring report prepared by the Local Authority's (LA) SACRE Officer was presented for discussion. This made an analysis of any comments on Religious Education (RE) or spiritual, social, moral and cultural development (SMSC) that were found in the Ofsted reports from Wandsworth schools inspected in the academic year 2023-2024. One primary school had had a deep dive in RE and the RE leader gave a presentation on the school's experience of this. The reports of faith schools inspected by the relevant authorities were also considered.

Three major reports relating to RE had been circulated with the papers in advance and each generated much discussion. They were "Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report" from Ofsted; "Developing a Religion and Worldviews approach in Religious Education in England; A Handbook for curriculum writers" - Stephen Pett; and the National Content Standard for Religious Education in England, from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. The Ofsted report gave SACRE members some cause for concern. The need for good RE teaching to incorporate world views and to increase the community understanding that led to better society cohesion were felt to be paramount. Sir Stephen Timms lecture and faith's place in Labour's mission of national renewal was shared. Discussions led to a decision for Wandsworth SACRE to write to the DfE, with the support of local MPs and the Executive Director of the Council's Children's Services, to voice its concerns.

It was noted that Wandsworth would be the London Borough of Culture in 2025 and possible contributions from local faith groups were debated.

The success of the Faith Trails for primary schools (see section 5 below) was celebrated and the report on them discussed.

NASACRE's training plan, which enabled all members to attend any training provided by NASACRE free of charge, was shared with the group and members encouraged to sign up for any sessions in which they had a particular interest.

The NASACRE conference talk: "35+ things a good SACRE can do!" provided some ideas Wandsworth SACRE thought they could take forward.

### **Spring Term Meeting 2025**

5. Meeting held on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2025.

The SACRE Annual Report for 2023-24 was presented and discussed. The NASACRE template for the report was used. There was some discussion on Wandsworth schools' Religious Studies (RS) GCSE and A-Level results, which were better than the national average at GCSE, with some very good individual school results. At A level, while the percentage of passes was in line with national, those at A\* – B were lower.

Written feedback on the relaunched Faith Direct was discussed. This Wandsworth initiative for secondary schools pioneered by the Multi Faith Forum (MFF), was first held in 2006 in response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It took place annually until Covid but had not run since 2019. It consisted of a seminar held like a "speed dating" event with 100 students in groups of 10 from various Wandsworth schools having the chance to hear from and then question 10 different faith leaders from Wandsworth. All major faiths were represented, plus those with a strong Wandsworth presence. SACRE took this over from MFF and was delighted with the success of the revived event, which took place in Interfaith week. It was opened by the Council's Cabinet Member for Education and closed by the Mayor. Faith leaders, teachers and students all reported very positively on their experiences.

Three SACRE members had attended an Interfaith Week consultation workshop and reported on the discussions.

The NASACRE reflection resources from the NASACRE website were used for a group work activity in twos and threes. The questions debated were "What makes an effective SACRE?" and "What makes a good SACRE member?" It was found to be a very worthwhile exercise which generated much meaningful discussion.

### **Summer Term Meeting 2025**

#### **6. Meeting held on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2025**

The major item for discussion was the Curriculum and Assessment review interim report. Members agreed with the general points raised regarding RE and the need for improvements on a national and local scale.

Feedback was given on the NASACRE conference and some of the papers were shared.

The outcomes of the NASACRE reflection resources activity undertaken at the last meeting were reviewed, following analysis of the comments and common top priorities. This was followed by group work on the other NASACRE reflection resources "What does quality RE look like?" and "What do we want pupils to gain from their experience of RE?"

## 2. Religious Education

### **Syllabus**

The current Wandsworth Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS) was originally launched in September 2017. Due to the new directions in RE relating to Worldviews and forthcoming commissions for exemplar syllabi, it was updated and extended rather than replaced. The revised document was approved in February 2023 and continues to be in use.

### **Monitoring and standards**

Standards in RE in secondary schools were monitored by scrutinising the exam data from GCSEs and A level. See appendix.

A trawl was also made of Ofsted reports to look for references to RE and SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development). This was done and reported upon in the first meeting of the new academic year, September 2024. Section 48 reports are also sent to SACRE. There were five in the last year, three by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) of a primary school and two SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspections, also of primary schools. It was noted how much fuller a picture of school life, British values, personal and social development and SMSC is given in the reports on faith schools than in standard Ofsted reports.

### **Continuing professional development**

The primary RE subject leaders' network met once in each term at Wandsworth's Professional Development Centre. The foci for meetings in the last year were:

- A presentation and discussion on Buddhism from the Buddhist representative on Faith Direct; a look at the vocabulary needed for pupils to fully benefit from a visit to a place of worship and a sharing of Christmas activity suggestions.
- Talks and discussions with the Imam from Wandsworth SACRE, followed by a book scrutiny from some of the primary schools and a sharing of Easter activity suggestions.
- Q and A with the Jewish representative from Wandsworth SACRE, followed by a presentation on cross curricular opportunities to extend the RE curriculum.

### **Other support for schools**

The email network group set up by the LA SACRE Officer continued to enable members to keep in touch with each other to seek advice and share good practice. It includes some subject leaders from independent schools as well as LA community schools.

The LA SACRE Officer produced a termly newsletter which had a calendar of events including major faith festivals, signposted good practice and shared resources.

SACRE produced guidance for schools on Ramadan, which is updated annually (see appendix).

No complaints about religious education in schools were referred to SACRE this year.

### **3. Collective Worship**

No monitoring of collective worship, either of quality or compliance to statutory requirements, took place during the year. No requests for determinations were received during the year. No schools in Wandsworth have been given determinations in the past.

No complaints regarding collective worship in the community schools of Wandsworth were referred to SACRE during the year. SACRE produced guidance for schools on collective worship (see appendix).

#### **Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests**

There were no FOI requests during the past year.

### **4. Links with other bodies**

Wandsworth SACRE is affiliated to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

Close links were maintained with Wandsworth's Voluntary Sector Development Manager, one of whose briefs was to connect and support faith groups across the borough. She provided relevant information to SACRE meetings and was active in promoting multi faith/cultural events.

There are good links with the Church of England Diocese of Southwark and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, whose advisers to Wandsworth's VA schools are much valued by the schools themselves and the School Improvement Service.

### **5. Other SACRE local involvement**

The Faith Trails for Year 5 and 6 pupils in primary schools, a SACRE initiative which began in the 2021-22 academic year, grew and continued to flourish during the last year, and were referred to in the Chair's opening remarks. Some Group A members were very helpful in facilitating these. There are now four trails in operation, covering different areas of the borough – Wimbledon Parkside, Southfields, Balham and Tooting.

There were 14 trail dates offered last year, welcoming 20 schools. While trail dates can accommodate two one form or small two form entry schools on the same day, larger three form entry schools need the entire slot. 23 different

schools have now taken part, with some of these schools making this a part of their regular curriculum offer in RE. Evaluations from hosts and schools were extremely positive and pupils' work from the visits of a high standard, showing much thought and perception.

## 6. SACRE's Administrative Arrangements and Financial Support

SACRE meetings are clerked by a Democratic Services Officer from Wandsworth Council. An officer is provided to support the LA.

The annual budget for support for SACRE in 2024-25 was £6000, the same as in 2023-24. This funded the LA SACRE Officer, NASACRE membership, the annual conference and other incidental expenses. Wandsworth Town Hall provided a room for meetings, but it has now been established that at least one meeting a year is held at a place of worship. As noted, this year, one meeting was at the Town Hall and two in places of worship.

### Membership

While some members had been in place for a number of years, there is always some movement in the membership, but vacancies were quickly addressed. There were no inquorate meetings in the past year.

Group A contains representatives of all the major faiths and some denominations or branches within them, and two nominated deputies for some faiths. The Humanist member gained full membership last year.

### Training

The LA Officer attended the NASACRE conference in 2025. SACRE is also happy to fund a certain amount of training for members.

## 7. Appendices

Tables of exam results for the year 24-25

CPD provided for schools – see above

SACRE has provided advice for schools on Collective Worship -  
[wandsworth\\_sacre\\_guidance\\_on\\_collective\\_worship.pdf](#)  
and on Ramadan

[Wandsworth Ramadan guidance](#)  
(updated annually)

In addition to the DfE and NASACRE, the report is circulated to SACRE members and schools.

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## WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

### SACRE - JANUARY 2026

#### **STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXAMINATIONS IN 2025**

- **Introduction**

This paper summarises the Wandsworth and England results for 2025 Religious Studies GCSE and A Level examinations. It provides more detailed data for Wandsworth down to school level.

This is provided for information and discussion.

- **Summary of national data**

Outcomes are still provisional to date (software to be updated with final data in April). Headline figures are as follows:

#### **The key outcomes for Religious Education in England at KS4 and KS5 in 2025**

- There were 218,631 entries for the full course in GCSE Religious Studies (RS), a decrease from 2024 (224,925).
- This was still higher than 2023 however (193,610).
- There was no data available for entries for the short course in GCSE RS.
- The percentage of grades 9-4 increased from 72 in 2024 to 72.3 in 2025.
- The points average rose slightly from 5.1 in 2024 to 5.2 in 2025.
- There were 14,210 entries at A level, continuing a downward trend since 2018 (14,530 in 2024, 16,660 in 2018).
- Percentages of A\*- B rose from 54.5 in 2024 to 56.4 in 2025. A - E rose slightly to 98.1%.

- **Summary of Wandsworth data**

- 1,090 students sat a Religious Studies (RS) examination in Wandsworth in 2025, very similar to the numbers in 2024 (1,038).
- 1,010 students sat the GCSE full course (949 in 2024), but none the short course.
- As for previous years, the number of students in the cohort has been included in the data, which shows the wide variation in the percentage of a cohort opting for RS. There was again a great divergence between schools in this: St Cecilia's, St John Bosco, Chestnut Grove and Graveney entered the vast majority of their students; Ashcroft about half and Harris Battersea and Burntwood a third. Ark Putney entered students for the first time in some years, but Southfields and Ernest Bevin again did not.
- It is not surprising that church schools enter more pupils, as RS is entitled to a defined amount of curriculum time, 10% in Catholic schools.
- The indicator of GCSE grades 9 - 4 for Ark Bolingbroke, Ashcroft, Burntwood, St John Bosco and Graveney were all above the LA average, Ashcroft, Ark Bolingbroke and Burntwood significantly so. Harris Battersea, Chestnut Grove, St Cecilia's and Ark Putney were below. Burntwood had made an improvement of 20% from 2024. The LA average rose from 79.4% in 2023 to 79.7% in 2025.
- The GCSE points score average for Wandsworth was 5.6, down 0.1 from 2024, but still higher than the national average of 5.2. The highest points scores were achieved by Ark Bolingbroke (6.7), Ashcroft (6.3) and Graveney (6.1). The lowest were at Harris (4.8) and Chestnut Grove (4.9).
- From 2024 to 2025, the highest GCSE improvements in point score averages were at St John Bosco and Burntwood (0.6).
- Harris Battersea saw the biggest GCSE fall at 0.7, but Chestnut Grove has seen averages fall on a downward trajectory since 6.2 in 2022 to 4.9 in 2025.
- Overall percentages of students achieving GCSE grades 9 – 4 showed that Wandsworth was again above the national average – 79.7% compared with 72.3% national, and up 0.3% from the 2024 average of 79.4%.
- There were just two entrants for AS level, both from Graveney. One passed (C– E) and the other did not.
- There were 78 entrants at A level, fewer than the 91 in 2024. Nationally, the number of entrants had dropped too, from 14,530 in 2024 to 14,210 in 2025. At A level, the percentage A\* - B comparator in Wandsworth rose to 48.7%, up from the 35.6% of 2024, but still below the national comparator of 56.4%. Well above the national were Bolingbroke (75% from 12 students), Ashcroft at 66.7% (four students) and St Cecilia's (62.5% from eight students). Well below national and local comparators was Graveney with 21.1% (19 students).

**Report to SACRE on Religious Studies examination results 2025**

- The biggest A level improvements from 2024 to 2025 in A – B\* were at Bolingbroke, Burntwood and Chestnut Grove, where they doubled their percentages.
- At A\* - E, Wandsworth (100%) was above the average of 2024 (96.7%) and the national average of 98.1%

**Subject: Religious Studies (4610)**

**Qual: GCSE Full Course (provisional 2025 results do not include FB data)**

Centre	Entries/Number in cohort				% 9 - 4				Average points			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>NCER National</b>	<b>144010</b>	<b>193610</b>	<b>224945</b>	<b>218631</b>	<b>75.3</b>	<b>72.2</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72.3</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>LA Comparator</b>	952	939	956	<b>1010</b>	85	80.6	79.4	<b>79.7</b>	5.9	5.7	5.7	<b>5.6</b>
Ark Bolingbroke Academy	28/104	29/112	19/115	26/111	79	79.3	89.5	92.3	5.5	5.4	6.6	6.7
Ashcroft Technology Academy	97/203	108/209	111/235	112/238	96	91.7	85.6	87.5	6.5	6.7	6.7	6.3
Harris Battersea	33/166	23/174	34/164	57/158	88	73.9	79.4	71.9	6.2	4.7	5.5	4.8
Burntwood	86/261	104/280	82/253	75/245	91	81.7	70.7	90.7	6.2	5.5	5.1	5.7
Chestnut Grove	157/175	150/171	157/172	187/200	91	84	77.7	71.7	6.2	5.8	5.2	4.9
Ark Putney	0/118	0	0	22/141				63.6				
Ernest Bevin	13/164	0	0	0	100				5.8			
Graveney School	269/281	265/277	272/280	277/286	89	84.9	86.4	85.9	6.3	6	6.2	6.1
Saint John Bosco	121/130	115/133	125/134	108/129	73	73.9	72.8	80.6	4.9	5.4	4.9	5.5
Southfields	0/145	0	0	0								
Saint Cecilia's	148/148	144/147	154/156	145/151	70	66.7	72.7	69.0	5.1	4.9	5.3	5.3
Francis Barber		01/36	02/37	TBC		100	50		8	5.0		

**Report to SACRE on Religious Studies Examination Results 2025**

**A & AS level results in Wandsworth schools (does not include sixth form colleges)**

**Subject: Religious Studies (4610)**

**Qual: GCE AS level**

Centre	Entries				%A-B			%A-E		
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
NCER National						TBC	50		TBC	84.8
LA Comparator	None taken	6	2	2	0	50	0	50	50	50
Ark Bolingbroke Academy										
Ashcroft Technology Academy			1			100			100	
Burntwood										
Chestnut Grove										
Ark Putney										
Ernest Bevin										
Harris Battersea										
Graveney School		6	1	2	0	0	0	50	0	50
Saint John Bosco										
Southfields										
Saint Cecilia's										

## Report to SACRE on Religious Studies examination results 2025

## Subject: Religious Studies (4610)

Qual: GCE A level

Centre	Entries				%A* - B				%A* - E			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>National (provisional)</b>	<b>14950</b>	<b>14720</b>	<b>14530</b>	<b>14210</b>	<b>67.8</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>98.7</b>	<b>97.6</b>	<b>97.4</b>	<b>98.1</b>
<b>LA Comparator</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>73.9</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>97.9</b>	<b>96.7</b>	<b>100</b>
Ashcroft Technology Academy	19	7	6	4	89.5	71.4	83.3	66.7	100	100	100	100
Bolingbroke Academy	3	12	14	12	100	25	35.7	75.0	100	100	100	100
Burntwood	9	18	22	9	55.6	38.9	18.2	44.4	100	100	95.5	100
Chestnut Grove	14	23	18	11	57.1	43.5	27.8	54.5	100	100	94.4	100
Ernest Bevin	0	0	0	0								
Graveney School	11	11	14	19	58.3	41.7	50	21.1	100	91.7	100	100
Harris Academy Battersea	0	0	0	0					0	0	0	
Saint John Bosco	0	13	9	13		38.5	44.4	46.2	0	100	100	100
Southfields	0	0	0	0								
Saint Cecilia's	12	11	8	8	91.7	75	37.5	62.5	100	91.7	87.5	100

2025 data is provisional

National from [Time-series - A level subject entries and grade by sex, Data set from A level and other 16 to 18 results - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#) gives finalised 2024 data.

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**Curriculum and  
Assessment  
Review**

**Building a  
world-class  
curriculum  
for all**

**Final Report**

**November 2025**

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- Reviews the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

## Religious Education (RE)

- RE is a basic curriculum<sup>299</sup> subject from Key Stages 1 to 4 and in school sixth forms.
- Take-up of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies was 28% in 2009/10 and 31% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 70% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Religious Studies.
- A Level Religious Studies entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24.

Since 1944, RE has been a compulsory subject in schools in England in some form. Initially, this was 'religious instruction' and was limited only to Christianity. At the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the subject's title changed to 'Religious Education' and encompassed the other main world religions represented in Great Britain in addition to Christianity. Local Authority Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) became mandatory, and RE became part of a school's basic curriculum for all pupils and students between the age of 5 and 18. The legislative requirements for RE in relation to maintained schools have since been mirrored in funding agreements for academies.

The RE stakeholder context is diverse, including different faith bodies, secular groups and experts from teaching and the education sector more widely. Stakeholders' responses to our Call for Evidence showed there was a strong consensus about the subject's importance and its essential place in a school's curriculum, stressing its important role in children and young people's intellectual, personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.<sup>300</sup> RE is a place where they encounter differing beliefs, sometimes for the first time, understand the tenets of major faiths, and learn how to reason and wrestle with existential questions. Understanding the tenets of Christianity also unlocks a wider understanding of British culture in terms of Christianity's historic

<sup>299</sup> A 'basic curriculum' subject is not on the national curriculum but must be provided by schools. Parents or carers have the right to withdraw their child from these subjects, though different conditions may apply between subjects: GOV.UK (2025) - [The national curriculum: Overview](#)

<sup>300</sup> The National Archives (2025) - [Education Act 2002](#)

influence and how it has shaped modern-day Britain. We have heard that RE provides a space for pupils to learn about human mutuality and reciprocity, that it develops their capacity to understand one another, and that it supports strong, secure, and confident communities with good relationships. Given the role that religion, belief and values play in local, national, and international events, it continues to be vital for children and young people to have access to high-quality RE.

Given RE's status as a basic rather than national curriculum subject, its content is not nationally defined, and no specified national standard exists against which to benchmark the quality of compulsory RE at Key Stages 1 to 4. While there are undoubtedly pockets of excellent practice in both faith and non-faith schools, the evidence suggests that provision for RE in many schools is not good enough and does not prepare pupils adequately for life beyond school.<sup>301</sup>

Syllabi for RE are locally determined by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). SACREs then advise local authorities on their delivery; they also advise local authorities on all matters relating to RE. Some SACREs support high-quality regional practice, but many no longer have the resources or reach to provide such support, resulting in increasing fragmentation.<sup>302</sup> Financial constraints have led to squeezed support in many areas, meaning that producing new agreed syllabi is often done with a 'very tight budget' and is 'increasingly reliant on voluntary support'.<sup>303</sup> The 2018 Commission on RE concluded that the structures and systems supporting RE have not kept pace with changes in the wider education sector, including greater academisation, a move towards a school-led system, and a world in which children and young people encounter a broader range of world views, including, for example, Humanism.<sup>304</sup>

All this is further exacerbated by the complex legislative framework underpinning RE, which hasn't changed in substance since 1944, apart from some minor updates in 1988. Curriculum requirements depend on school type and may differ between academies and maintained schools, as well as between schools with a religious designation and those without. As Ofsted has concluded, the quality of RE is not necessarily determined by the type of school, but the differing requirements seemingly contribute to a lack of parity across the sector.<sup>305</sup> Moreover, the Review has heard that, in practice, the dated legislation has invited 'workarounds', including regarding the ongoing requirement to teach RE to the age of 18 in schools. Throughout our engagement with sector experts and during the Call for Evidence, we have heard that this static statutory backdrop, with

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<sup>301</sup> Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#); Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

<sup>302</sup> A report from the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on RE (NASACRE) found that the majority of SACREs in England were not receiving a sufficient share of the central school services block (CSSB) which would reasonably be expected so that they could meet their statutory functions, including the provision of a clerk. NASACRE (2023) – NASACRE's Second Report.

<sup>303</sup> Smalley, P. (2019) - [A critical policy analysis of local religious education in England](#)

<sup>304</sup> Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

<sup>305</sup> Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#)

complex and fraying local support arrangements, has led to uneven provision and tokenistic practice in some areas.

Some work to improve and standardise a curriculum offer for RE has been done, most notably by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), which published its National Content Standard for RE in England in 2023.<sup>306</sup> This has received consensus from across the sector and laid strong foundations for change. We believe it has potential as a catalyst for more substantial reform.

RE can be controversial and contentious. Different sector and faith organisations have different beliefs and different interests in the present arrangements. We have therefore engaged widely on this subject during the Review, seeking as many views as possible and aiming to identify points of consensus as well as areas of debate. Having evaluated the evidence, we are of the view that RE's importance is not currently reflected in its standing in the curriculum. The Review believes that RE should be moved to the national curriculum to improve access to high-quality provision and to prevent further diminishment. However, we are conscious of the sensitivities and complexities involved, including the legislative implications and the wider considerations relating to voluntary-aided schools with a religious character. It is important that these issues are accounted for in our recommendations.

The Review ultimately wishes to see RE in the national curriculum, but it recognises that it is unrealistic for this to be achieved immediately. We therefore believe that a staged approach to reform is the most appropriate way forward. To this end, we recommend that the Government invites the sector to establish an independent task and finish group made up of representatives from faith bodies, secular groups and experts from the teaching and wider education sector, to develop a draft RE curriculum. This group should be consultative, continuing the work of the Review in liaising with relevant external parties (including faith groups and communities, secular groups and faith and non-faith schools) and should seek to build on the REC's National Content Standard. The group should also consider whether there would be benefit in changing the name of Religious Education.

The process of producing a draft RE curriculum will be important in establishing whether a core of RE content can be agreed on across the sector to facilitate any move of RE to the national curriculum. Most stakeholders agree that all pupils, regardless of the type of school they attend, should have an entitlement to high-quality RE and that the most effective way to do this is by moving it to the national curriculum. However, if this desired quality and consistency are to be achieved, there will be trade-offs, and all parties will have to make compromises to achieve consensus.

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<sup>306</sup> Religious Education Council (2023) - [National Content Standard for RE in England – 1st Edition – 2023](#)

We recognise that making RE a national curriculum subject is not a panacea that will automatically improve the quality and quantity of compulsory RE. Other mechanisms would also be needed, including reviewing the DfE's non-statutory guidance for RE (which has not been updated since it was published in 2010) and the wider framework (which includes SACREs, for example). Following any changes, attention may also need to be given to the subject content of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies.

Finally, the Review has carefully considered the requirement that learners study RE between the age of 16 and 18. Currently, this requirement applies only to learners attending school sixth forms and does not extend to other 16-19 providers, such as sixth form colleges and further education colleges. The Review considers that, by age 16, students should have a secure grounding in RE, and one that should be strengthened if the recommendation about the national curriculum is taken forward. We also consider the compulsory study of RE to 18 to be inconsistent with 16-19 study's aim of prioritising learners' choices and subject specialisms. As such, we recommend removing the statutory requirement that learners in school sixth forms study RE: the Government should consider this as part of its review of the wider legislation in which RE sits. We believe this will better reflect actual practice and foster parity across 16-19 settings. We recognise that some schools will want to continue providing RE up to 18, and they would be free to do so. If learners wish to continue to study RE at 16-19, level 3 qualifications are available for them to do so.

## Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adds RE to the national curriculum in due course. A staged approach should be taken, in line with the following steps:

### **Stage 1:**

Representatives from faith groups, secular groups and the wider teaching and education sector that we heard from during the Review should build on the constructive and collaborative work they have been doing through the course of the Review. DfE should invite the sector to form a task and finish group, convened and led by an expert Chair who is independent of any particular secular or faith group interest or representation. The review recommends that, given her leadership of this strand of the Review's work (based on her expertise), Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE should undertake this role, ensuring momentum in the successful convening she has established. This group should liaise with relevant external parties and, building on the existing National Content Standard for RE in England, engage with faith and non-faith schools, as well as RE organisations and faith communities, to co-create a draft RE curriculum.

Whilst this work should be sector-led, the DfE should welcome efforts the sector makes to reach a consensus and support and facilitate this group where necessary.

Alongside this, the DfE should consider the legislative framework for RE, including, for example, what any changes to its status in the curriculum would mean for functions such as SACREs. A long-term plan for implementing potential changes to legislation should be drafted.

As part of this review, the DfE should consider removing the statutory requirement for learners in school sixth forms to study RE.

In parallel, the DfE should review the non-statutory guidance for RE, which has not been updated since 2010, to establish whether beneficial changes to subject content could be made in the short term that do not pre-empt the wider work the Review is recommending.

### **Stage 2:**

If consensus on a draft RE curriculum can be reached, the DfE should conduct a formal consultation on the detailed content.

Alongside this, the DfE should consult on proposed changes to the legislative framework, including any proposal to repeal the requirement to teach RE in school sixth forms.

## **Science**

- Science is a statutory core curriculum subject from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4.
- GCSE Combined Science take-up was 63% in 2009/10 and 66% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Biology take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 24% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Chemistry take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Physics take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.<sup>307</sup>
- In 2024/25, 91% of state-funded schools entered students for Combined Science; 87% for Biology and 82% for Chemistry and Physics.
- A Level Biology entries made up 7% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 8% in 2023/24.
- A Level Chemistry entries made up 5% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 7% in 2023/24.

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<sup>307</sup> Students may decide to take a single science GCSE alongside their Combined Science GCSE. Therefore, there may be differences in the proportion of take up across the single sciences.

- Redrafts the aims of PE so that they are clearer and more coherent at each key stage.
- Introduces a concise, scaffolded approach to the attainment targets and key stage subject content within the Programmes of Study. As part of this, the Government should review how the Programmes of Study refer to individual activities (such as dance, swimming and outdoor activity), including whether they are sufficiently specific to support quality teaching.
- Distinguishes clearly between mandatory core PE and qualification pathways, and develops distinct terminology for each. This can be achieved by renaming GCSE PE, and considering whether any content changes are required to ensure it retains a focus on sports science. The content of Key Stage 4 mandatory non-assessed PE should be revised to ensure that it focuses primarily on physical activity
- Reviews the current GCSE PE activity list to consider ways in which it could be made more inclusive for all students, especially for students with SEND.

## Dance recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Reviews how the PE Key Stage 1 to 4 Programmes of Study refer to Dance, including whether they are sufficiently specific to support high-quality teaching and students' progression, including to further study.
- Reviews the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

## Religious Education (RE) recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adds RE to the national curriculum in due course. A staged approach should be taken, in line with the following steps:
  - **Stage 1:**

Representatives from faith groups, secular groups and the wider teaching and education sector that we heard from during the Review should build on the constructive and collaborative work they have been doing through the course of the Review. DfE should invite the sector to form a task and finish group, convened and led by an expert Chair who is independent of any particular secular or faith group interest or representation. The Review recommends that, given her leadership of this strand of the Review's work (based on her expertise), Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE should undertake this

role, ensuring momentum in the successful convening she has established. This group should liaise with relevant external parties and, building on the existing National Content Standard for RE in England, engage with faith and non-faith schools, as well as RE organisations and faith communities, to co-create a draft RE curriculum.

Whilst this work should be sector-led, the DfE should welcome efforts the sector makes to reach a consensus and support and facilitate this group where necessary.

Alongside this, the DfE should consider the legislative framework for RE, including, for example, what any changes to its status in the curriculum would mean for functions such as Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs). A long-term plan for implementing potential changes to legislation should be drafted.

As part of this review, the DfE should consider removing the statutory requirement for learners in school sixth forms to study RE.

In parallel, the DfE should review the non-statutory guidance for RE, which has not been updated since 2010, to establish whether beneficial changes to subject content could be made in the short term that do not pre-empt the wider work the Review is recommending.

- **Stage 2:**

If consensus on a draft RE curriculum can be reached, the DfE should conduct a formal consultation on the detailed content.

Alongside this, the DfE should consult on proposed changes to the legislative framework, including any proposal to repeal the requirement to teach RE in school sixth forms.

## Science recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures more cohesion and consistency across the primary Science curriculum, including clearer guidance on what should be taught, to what depth, at each stage.
- At all key stages, bases the Science curriculum on the fundamental concepts of each individual discipline so that students develop deep scientific and disciplinary knowledge and skills. In light of this, the Government should consider where content can be streamlined, especially at GCSE, without affecting rigour or the subject's knowledge-rich focus.

## **Curriculum and Assessment Review**

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# Briefing Sheet for Wandsworth/Kingston/Richmond SACREs

## Purpose of this briefing to SACRES

This briefing sheet is to advise SACRES on the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) mandatory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) for use in schools from September 2026.

Wandsworth, Richmond and Kingston Local Authorities are working together to update their own guidance to schools on RHSE. In 2019 Wandsworth produced a document called Getting to Grips with the new RSHE guidance and Richmond and Kingston Achieving for Children produced a joint statement of support for schools. For the 2026 DfE update the three boroughs will be producing a single joint document of briefing and support for schools on RSHE for implementation from September 2026. The working title of this document is 'Getting to Grips 2', although a more appropriate title will be found before final publication.

This briefing sheet for SACREs, and a glimpse at the first draft of the joint document being prepared by Wandsworth, Richmond and Kingston, are to keep SACREs up to date with the new DfE guidance and how schools will have to comply with it.

After SACREs have read this briefing, the draft Local Authority document along with the new DfE mandatory guidance on RSHE, the authors of the joint document would be happy to receive any feedback from SACREs, should they choose to make it.

## Context of RSHE

Schools have long been tasked to provide not just academic and creative education for children and young people, but also to educate them to be equipped as well as possible with knowledge and skills that will help keep them safe and healthy as they take their place in the world today.

In order to do this, schools have to provide learning opportunities and discuss topics that include how their bodies work and reproduce, possible threats and harms that can come to them from unhealthy activities such as alcohol and drugs, and the nature of human relationships including sexual ones. These lessons are known as RSHE and schools usually provide at least one dedicated lesson on them each week for students.

OFSTED are always keen to look during their inspections at how well schools prepare children for adult life with RSHE lessons, and they often comment directly upon it in their reports.

## Why is this an issue for SACREs?

There is an overlap between some RSHE topics and those that are covered in Religious Studies lessons, both at Primary and Secondary level, as aspects of them may be regarded as moral or ethical issues. This extends to examination level (both GCSE and A level), as these often explore faith perspectives on issues such as sex and sexuality, drugs, women's rights etc and have had these at the core of the curriculum for a long time. It is important that SACREs are aware of the new DfE guidance, as part of their role regarding Religious Studies in schools.

## Content and Nature of RSHE lessons.

From time to time the DfE issues new guidance for schools in these areas which updates the topics taught to reflect the current picture in the world today - for example, the growth in the place of electronic technologies and the internet in young people's lives has given rise to dangers and experiences that just did not exist in the past, and it is important that schools

include these topics and keep their curricula as up to date as necessary to make sure they stay appropriate and relevant. Children and young people should not only learn facts in these lessons, they should also be given time and activities to be able to reflect on the topics to help form their own healthy responses to the possible harms that are sadly present in the world today.

By their nature, RSHE lessons teach about personal and adult topics which some parents may have concerns about their children learning. Parents may feel ill-equipped to discuss these topics with their own children and fear that schools will in some way expose children to harm rather than help them develop healthy responses. Should parents have these fears, they should discuss them with schools who under the new guidance are able to show parents the kind of resources and lessons to help dispel any such concerns.

Similarly, some parents may be concerned that their own faith may have teachings in some of these topics, and may be concerned that teaching in school might go against their beliefs. Again, should parents have these fears they should discuss them directly with the school to find out what is actually being taught, what resources are being used and how the lessons are structured, because it is most likely that their fears are unfounded. It is clear in the DfE guidance that schools should teach all these topics at the appropriate age and stage of learning for their children and young people, and indeed this has long been the case.

Parents and faith groups have confidence that schools tailor their lessons in Maths, English, Science and other subjects appropriately to the age and stage of learning of the children in their classes, and be inclusive in nature reflecting different views where appropriate, and RSHE is no different in these regards.

### **New DfE Update.**

Relationships, Sex Education and Health Education (RSHE) guidelines were last updated significantly in 2019, and the DfE have just issued a new update to this guidance for schools to be implemented in September 2026. This update can be found by clicking this link below.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b8499e11b4ded2da19fd92/Relationships\\_educa tion\\_relationships\\_and\\_sex\\_education\\_and\\_health\\_education\\_-statutory\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b8499e11b4ded2da19fd92/Relationships_educa tion_relationships_and_sex_education_and_health_education_-statutory_guidance.pdf)

### **What the new guidance covers**

Sections 1 and 2 in the draft joint document details what the new guidance covers

### **Faith Responses.**

Faiths in Britain who sponsor schools usually produce their own curricula which reflect their own teachings whilst fulfilling the requirements of the DfE guidance and to date this has been working well. In the joint guidance to schools document you will find links to some of these resources in Section 6, and by the time the document is finally produced, more resources will have been developed by groups and will be included in this section. Should any member of SACRE be aware of any updated school resources for their own particular faith other than those shown, the authors of the joint document would be happy to receive signposting to them.

### **SACREs role in the new joint document.**

In sending the new joint document to SACREs whilst still in early draft form, Wandsworth, Richmond and Kingston are taking a step to keep SACREs informed of the existence of the new DfE guidance in order to reassure them as to what schools are being asked to do from Sept

2026, that the DfE guidance is both clear and mandatory on the topics it proscribes, and that schools are, as ever, working to continue to prepare children and young people to take a safe, healthy and happy place in the world.

With SACREs permission, the document would like to reflect that it has been shared with members in its draft form with each of the Local Authority SACREs.

Cath Brookes and Kaye Seamer – joint authors of the joint document.

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# Getting to Grips Version 2

## 2026 update to the mandatory guidance on

### Relationships Education, Relationships & Sex Education and Health Education

Some key advice for Wandsworth, Kingston  
and Richmond schools

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## **Statement of Support from DCS and Children's Councillors**

insert here the joint contribution / statement by the Directors of Children's Services of the three Local Authorities

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## **Section 1 – The updated guidance – a brief overview**

*'Children and young people need knowledge and skills that will enable them to make informed and ethical decisions about their well-being, health and relationships. High quality, evidence-based teaching of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can help prepare pupils for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life, and can promote their moral, social, mental and physical development. Effective teaching will support young people to cultivate positive characteristics including resilience, self-worth, self-respect, honesty, integrity, courage, kindness and trustworthiness. Effective teaching will support prevention of harms by helping young people understand and identify when things are not right.'*

*DfE Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams and teachers July 2025 page 2*

Schools have long been expected to deliver education that prepares children to take their place in the adult world. This has previously included learning about how their bodies work, how to be healthy and stay safe, both in the real world and the virtual, and how to get on with others in a positive and friendly way. Since the Equalities Act of 2010, schools have also been required to follow this legislation in ensuring that the education they provide incorporates and promotes the inclusion of all aspects of society, with reference to specific protected characteristics such as race, religion/belief, age, sex, gender reassignment, marital/partnership status, sexuality and ability. This education should be balanced, value-free and impartial.

In 2020, the DfE published new, statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education, and it now has updated this guidance to reflect changes in the law, and new issues that have become more prominent for young people since the publication of the original guidance seven years ago. Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) will continue to be inspected by Ofsted as part of the basic curriculum, and the impact of this learning will continue to be part of a school's judgement in regards to inspectors' consideration of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, and spiritual, moral and cultural development.

The 2026 updated guidance for RSHE is extended to Multi Academy Trust central staff teams, management committees of PRU's and providers of alternative provision including AP academies and AP free schools, where specific thought should be given to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of the pupils and what adjustments might be needed.

Schools are expected to review their existing policies and curricula for RSHE for implementation from September 2026, to ensure that their curriculum is informed by meaningful engagement with pupils and that it is relevant, engaging, and age and stage appropriate, with sequenced teaching so that pupils are supported and equipped with the knowledge to navigate different experiences in a positive way before they occur, and to prevent possible harms. Parents and carers still play a part in a school's review processes, continuing the good practice already established by which schools explain their curriculum. Part of the review process for the school's RSHE policy and curriculum should include consultation with parents. Further, it is now mandatory that schools should be transparent with parents and carers about the materials used in the teaching of RSHE, which should be made available to them.

Schools should also take active steps to engage pupils in designing what is taught.

Dealing with the topics which are covered by the updated guidance will require skilled delivery either by school staff or external providers, in order to create the safe and supportive environment needed to facilitate participative and interactive education, which aims to support rather than alarm pupils. From early 2026, schools will be able to apply for training grants to help their staff tackle these challenges with confidence. Safeguarding training continues to be important, in the event of disclosures made during or outside of lessons.

The updated RSHE guidance continues to empower schools by requiring delivery of a mandatory curriculum, and puts a renewed focus on positivity – emphasising the building of skills and positive attitudes amongst pupils, promoting healthy norms about relationships, including sexual relationships where relevant, and health, including mental health. The programmes of study for both primary and secondary phases are covered in detail in the updated guidance on pages 8 to 32 and these form a useful guide and a basis for both an audit of the school's curriculum, and a review of the policy.

## **Some headline developments to note from the new guidance are -**

**Principles, structure & flexibility** The new guidance emphasises pupil engagement, transparency with parents, and emphasises positivity and relevance as guiding principles. Schools will need show how they take active steps to engage their pupils in designing a curriculum that is relevant to student's lives, engages them in learning it and is transparent with parents about the materials used to deliver it.

**Age and stage** The new guidance emphasises sequencing and building up knowledge and skills progressively, rather than prescribing age limits. There is also an acknowledgement that some issues may be more prominent or pressing in some areas, or for individual or groups of children, which may require schools to consider when it is best to teach them. This gives schools more discretion in how and when to introduce topics, but also increases the responsibility to justify the sequencing choices they make.

**LGBTQ+** The new guidance more strongly encourages primary schools to include same-sex parents when discussing families, and in secondary to integrate healthy same-sex relationships into discussions throughout, rather than limit incorporating LGBTQ+ issues to one specific topic area, taught only once.

**Gender Identity** The new guidance states schools "should be careful not to endorse any particular view or teach it as fact," acknowledging there is debate over gender identity. The law should be the base for discussing these, and other issues, with a clear emphasis that respect for protected characteristics remains enshrined in that law.

**New or expanded content** Content is now added on some specific areas which reflect the evolving social, online, and safety challenges that were less prominent (or less clearly addressed) back in 2019. The online world has become a much more 'real' space for children and young people and helping them to understand what is 'real' and 'not real' has become significantly more important. Schools have a mandate to tackle these issues but may need to help teachers develop the skills and resources to cover these issues sensitively and effectively. Issues include :

- Misogyny, sexual harassment, sexual violence (public sexual harassment, revenge porn, upskirting, financial sexual exploitation, sexual strangulation/suffocation)
- Online harms & digital literacy around deepfakes, AI-generated sexual imagery, sharing images online, privacy, scams, and manipulation of images

- Personal safety, recognising and assessing risk, managing change & loss (including bereavement)
- Mental health, coping skills, resilience, suicide prevention
- Positive masculinity, ethical behaviour, challenging stereotypes / sexism

**Emphasis on skills** The new guidance gives stronger emphasis to skills development such as communication, assertiveness, boundary setting, resisting pressures, resilience, alongside factual knowledge. Dynamic learning using practical exercises, discussion, role play or scenario work may need to be introduced, or strengthened, to work towards this.

**Parental engagement & transparency** The new guidance strengthens the expectations that schools must consult parents when developing or renewing their curriculum and RSE/RSHE policy. Parents cannot veto content, and the right to withdraw their children from 'sex education' remains, although not the areas where the Science or Health curriculum are relevant. This remains unchanged, however schools should allow parents/carers to be able to view all curriculum materials used, responding positively to these requests. A section of the new guidance informs schools about the limits of contractual and copyright issues in this area, as these should not form a barrier to sharing materials used, including using those from third party providers. This new requirement may, at least at first, increase parental requests to see materials and schools should consider how best to share materials and explain curriculum choices.

## Some Considerations & Challenges

**Navigating controversy and balance:** Topics like gender identity, transgender issues, and LGBTQ+ content are more explicitly addressed in the new guidance. In teaching this, schools should be mindful that, beyond the facts and the law about biological sex and gender reassignment there is significant debate, and they should be careful not to endorse any particular view or teach it as fact. Good staff training and a clear knowledge of the law will be fundamental to doing this effectively. Without adequate teacher training, there is a risk of poor implementation.

**Resource development & updating schemes:** The new guidance updates that given in 2019, requiring schools to audit the provision and materials they already have, and working out which areas need development to align with new expectations. A review of the RSHE policy will also be necessary in regard of the new guidance, and engagement with both pupils and parents needs to be considered as part of this. With the stronger requirements on transparency and parent consultation, schools may face more scrutiny from parents over content, and so taking a lead on the narrative regarding the school's policy and curriculum would help integrate any new areas and make parents more confident of what the school curriculum is, what resources are being used and how the lessons are being delivered. Parents/carers trust schools to deliver curriculum content in other areas and this should be emphasised as no different.

**Sequencing & adaptation across phases:** Because the new guidance avoids rigid age cut-offs, schools must plan progression carefully to make sure content is covered at the right time for pupils to be aware of issues that may present harm to them. Thought should be given so as to avoid introducing content too soon or too late.

**Monitoring, evaluation, and review:** Schools will need to look at their mechanisms which evaluate how well the new curriculum is working and gather feedback from teachers, pupils and parents/carers, and use this to make appropriate adjustments if these are deemed necessary.

Feeding back to all stakeholders when this is done will also form part of a transparent approach to delivering the curriculum.

## **Section 2 Specific points to note** (page numbers refer to the updated RSHE guidance July 2025)

It is recommended that school leaders read the updated guidance in its entirety, but below are some specific points regarding some notable additions to the 2019 guidance.

### **Governors and Trustees (page 34)**

The updated guidance stipulates that alongside their other legal obligations, Governing boards and proprietors of Academy trusts should also ensure that all pupils make progress in achieving the expected educational outcomes, that teaching is made accessible to those pupils with SEND, the curriculum content and materials are aligned with the statutory guidance contained in the new update, and that clear information is provided for parents/carers on the subject content, teaching materials, and external providers and on the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education.

Foundation governors of maintained schools and trustees of academy trusts that include schools with a designated religious character will also have wider responsibilities in relation to maintaining and developing the religious ethos of their faith schools.

### **Teaching about the Law (page 35)**

The updated guidance says that there 'will be a range of opinion' regarding some topics covered in RSHE and a school's starting principle should be that the law should be taught in a factual way so that pupils are clear about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. A list of legal provisions relevant to the topics covered in RSHE is given and schools should be familiar with the laws which cover them, specifically :

- Marriage including forced marriage and civil partnerships
- Consent including the age of consent
- Domestic abuse, stalking, rape, sexual offences, FGM, 'virginity testing' and hymenoplasty
- Sexual Abuse, harassment and exploitation, including public sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour
- The Online Safety Act
- Online behaviours including image and information sharing (including sexual imagery, youth-produced sexual imagery, nudes etc and including AI generated sexual imagery and deepfakes)
- Online sexual harassment and online sexual abuse including grooming and sextortion.
- Pornography
- Abortion
- Protected characteristics
- Alcohol, smoking, vaping and nicotine products and illicit drug use
- Gambling
- Carrying knives and weapons
- Extremism/radicalisation
- Grooming or exploiting children into criminal activity which can include gang involvement and county lines drug running

- Hate crime
- The age of criminal responsibility
- Medical consent, Gillick competence and parental responsibility (this would also incorporate the Frasier guidance although it is not specifically mentioned in the new guidance)

## **Equality (page 36)**

Schools are required to comply with the relevant requirements of the Equality Act (2010) including the Public Sector equality duty (PSED) when teaching RSHE, in order for the pupils to understand the importance of equality and respect and learn about the law relating to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sex.

Schools must also ensure that topics in RSHE are taught in a way which does not discriminate against pupils or amount to harassment, avoid language which repeats or enforces gender stereotypes, and to encourage young people to express their views while remaining respectful of others.

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (page 36)**

Regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender content, primary schools are encouraged to teach about healthy, loving relationships and to include same-sex parents along with other family arrangements when discussing families. Secondary schools are advised that there should be an equal opportunity to explore the features of stable and healthy same-sex relationships and this should be integrated throughout a programme of study rather than form the focus of a stand-alone unit. The requirement to cover the diverse rage and nature of family life and relationships also continues to fall into the category of Relationships Education, and as such the Right to Withdraw does not apply to it. Should a parent/carer insist that this is not the case, headteachers should contact Wandsworth/Kingston/Richmond Local Authority for further guidance (please see section 8 of this document for relevant contact details)- we will put the appropriate list of personnel and contact details in nearer publication date.

## **Biological Sex and Gender Reassignment (page 36)**

Regarding issues of biological sex and gender reassignment, pupils should be taught the facts and the law around these issues, and be mindful that as there is significant debate about these issues, schools should be careful not to endorse any particular view nor teach it as fact. This includes the recognition that people have legal rights by virtue of their biological sex which are different from the rights of those of the opposite sex with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, and that all people with protected characteristics have protection from discrimination and should be treated with respect and dignity.

Regarding the use of external resources to teach these issues, schools are told to avoid the use of materials using cartoons or diagrams that may over-simplify this topic, or that may perpetuate stereotypes or encourage pupils to question their gender.

## **Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character (page 37)**

RSHE should be sensitive to the religious backgrounds of pupils, and schools should comply with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 under which religion and belief are amongst the protected characteristics. All schools may teach about faith perspectives on the topics covered and schools with a particular religious character may teach their distinctive faith perspective on relationships,

and balanced debate may take place about issues that are contentious. Schools should be clear when they are delivering content that reflects religious belief.

### **Pupils with SEND (page 37)**

Teaching should be developed to ensure RSHE is accessible to pupils with SEND and prepare pupils for adulthood. Schools should be aware that SEND pupils may be more vulnerable than their peers to harmful sexual behaviour, sexual abuse, exploitation, violence, bullying and other issues, and so be aware that RSHE is particularly important for these students.

### **Addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence (page 38)**

The updated guidance pays particular attention to the development of skills young people need to build healthy relationships and grow into kind, respectful adults. From early primary, schools are expected to support children to develop the skills necessary for positive, healthy relationships, including navigating boundaries with kindness and respect. These skills should be developed into secondary stage and will support pupils to understand and identify prejudice and to behave respectfully.

Regarding sexual violence, pupils should understand that anyone can be the victim of sexual violence, the victim is never to blame, and that most sexual violence is committed against women and girls, and often has a gendered component for example manifesting in an inequality of power between men and women, but language which stigmatises boys or suggests that boys and men are always perpetrators, or that women are always victims, should be avoided.

Staff should consider the language used in and beyond the classroom and take action to build a culture where prejudice is defined and tackled. Staff have an important role in modelling positive behaviour and avoiding language that might perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Pupils should understand the importance of challenging harmful beliefs and attitudes, and understand the link between sexism and misogyny and violence against women and girls. Where misogynistic ideas are expressed at school, staff should challenge the idea rather than the person expressing them.

Pupils should have opportunities to develop positive conceptions of masculinity, including how to identify and learn from positive masculine role models.

### **Safeguarding (page 39)**

Discussion of sensitive topics can lead to increased safeguarding reports so schools should ensure that all staff know what to do if they have concerns that a pupil is being neglected or abused. Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance provides a strong safeguarding framework and is clear on the actions a school or college should take if there are any concerns around a pupil's safety. In addition, if external providers are being used to deliver any lessons, schools must agree in advance how a safeguarding concern would be dealt with by the external visitor should it arise.

The updated guidance also refers to plans for new legislation which will make it a legal requirement for anyone in a regulated activity in England, including teachers, to report if they are made aware a child is being sexually abused.

The updated guidance reminds schools that mandatory reporting of FGM still pertains and that virginity testing and hymenoplasty became illegal in 2022. Staff should report any concerns regarding a child's welfare following KCSIE guidelines, and their own school's Child Protection policy, and speak to the DSL.

## **Managing Difficult Questions (page 40)**

The school's RSE policy should cover the eventuality of pupils asking questions about topics which go beyond any sex education covered by school or relating to sex education from which a pupil may have been withdrawn, explaining how a teacher would handle such questions with an emphasis on supporting the child. This may include asking the pupil to speak to a parent/carer, signposting to support services where needed and recognising that children whose questions go unanswered may turn to inappropriate sources for information, including online. The updated guidance recognises that this may be an area where staff may need training and support.

## **Regulations (page 41)**

The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019 are made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and still pertain. Pupils receiving primary education must be taught relationships education, pupils receiving secondary education must be taught RSE and all primary and secondary pupils must be taught health education. This applies to all maintained schools, academies, pupil referral units, maintained special schools, special academies and in maintained special schools. RSE must be taught in independent schools.

Schools must have regard to the guidance produced by the DfE, make a statement of policy on their provision of relationships education and RSE, and set out the circumstances in which a pupil is to be withdrawn from RSE.

These regulations now pertain to Multi Academy Trust central staff teams, management committees of PRU's and providers of alternative provision including AP academies and AP free schools.

## **Government Resources (page 42)**

A list of clickable links to useful curriculum and wider resources can be found at the end of the updated guidance.

The new guidance and further relevant information can be found using these links

DfE Guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education – July 2025

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b8499e11b4ded2da19fd92/Relationships\\_education\\_relationships\\_and\\_sex\\_education\\_and\\_health\\_education\\_-statutory\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b8499e11b4ded2da19fd92/Relationships_education_relationships_and_sex_education_and_health_education_-statutory_guidance.pdf)

DfE Statutory Guidance Relationships Education (Primary) - updated

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-education-primary>

DfE Statutory Guidance Relationships Education (Secondary) - updated

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-secondary>

The Oak National Academy

<https://www.thenational.academy/teachers/search?term=%22our+online+lives%22&subjects=rshe-pshe&contentTypes=unit&curriculum=new>

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### Section 3 Parents and Carers

*'Schools should take steps to pro-actively engage parents and make sure they are aware of what is being taught in RSHE. These steps might include inviting parents into school to discuss the curriculum content and the importance of RSHE for wellbeing and safety, inviting them to discuss any concern, and supporting parents in managing conversations with their children about RSHE topics. Schools must consult parents when developing and reviewing their RSE policies in accordance with the section on developing a policy'*

DfE Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory Guidance July 2025 page 33

Parents and carers should be given opportunities to understand the purpose and content of the RSHE curriculum and to raise any questions or concerns they may have. They should understand that the subject is mandatory and will be carefully planned to be age-appropriate and developmental, and will prepare children and young people for life within and beyond school. In order to maintain the harmonious collaboration between schools and parents and carers, schools need to be proactive in engaging and informing them so that they understand what is being taught and that it is being taught in a balanced and impartial way. It is important for children to see that their family, however this is made up, is represented in their learning, so that they understand that families can be different but that they all have the same purpose – to love, care for and support the child.

A new requirement in the updated guidance is that schools should show parents a representative sample of the resources they plan to use, enabling parents to continue conversations started in class, and ensure that, if requested, parents/carers can view all curriculum materials used. Parents/carers are not able to veto curriculum content (page 34 of the new guidance) but schools must consult with them when developing their RSHE policy.

If a school uses external providers to deliver any aspect of the curriculum it is advised that schools should not agree to any contractual restrictions on showing parents any content that the school will use, as they are now legally obliged to have regard of the statutory guidance, and any such clauses that may now exist in contracts are now void and unenforceable, because they contradict the clear public policy interest of ensuring parents/carers are aware of what their children are being taught in sex and relationships education.

Where copyright law exists, schools are expected to comply with it, and the use of a 'parent portal' for viewing resources is advised as best practice, with the caveat that when schools make resources available, they should include a statement that parents/carers agree as a condition of access that content should not be copied or shared further in accordance with copyright law. IT restrictions such as to prevent any downloading could be used where possible, and the authorship of any materials should be acknowledged.

If parents/carers cannot use any of the online or school-based presentations, copies may be made to take home provided the parent/carer agrees to a similar statement that they will not copy or share the content except as authorised in copyright law. Copyright law affects the way in which the materials are shared but should not be used as a reason not to share them.

#### **The right of withdrawal from Sex Education**

Under the updated guidance, parents/carers continue to have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSHE. From three terms

before the pupil turns 16, it becomes the young person's choice to opt into these lessons even if a parent/carer has requested withdrawal. Should a Primary school wish to designate any of their curriculum as Sex Education this needs to be clearly defined and it is to these lessons that parents/carers may exercise the right to withdraw. Parents/carers do not have the right to withdraw pupils from relationships education or health education, nor can they be withdrawn from topics taught as part of the Science curriculum, including topics related to puberty and sexual reproduction. Primary schools will have faced the issues regarding the teaching of Sex Education before, and the updated guidance continues to confirm current practice.

Suggested protocol should a parent or carer ask to withdraw their child from specific parts of the curriculum

Note – if the request is verbal and made to the classroom teacher or assistant, the member of staff should request that the parent or carer put their request in writing to the headteacher.

1 Inform the chair of governors and local authority of the request to withdraw. They should both be updated as the matter progresses.

2 Headteacher to invite the parent or carer into school, by phone or letter, for a meeting to discuss their request.

3 The headteacher should lead the meeting, and contemporaneous notes should be taken. These should be written up into a record of the meeting for school files and reference, as they may be required at a later date.

4 During the meeting the following areas could be discussed

- what the curriculum actually entails, and whether it is classified as Relationships Education, Relationships & Sex Education or Health Education
- teaching materials should be shared and explained
- the statutory nature of the content should be explained
- the right to withdraw should be discussed, and the updated guidance applied to judge if the request is in accordance with it
- other parental feedback to the curriculum could be discussed if appropriate
- materials regarding faith responses could be used (see the 'Useful Links' in Section 7 of this document)
- the parent or carer could be given the opportunity to go away and consider their request and whether they wish it to go ahead

5 The meeting should be followed up as soon as possible by a letter to the parent / carer thanking them for attending the meeting, summarising the matters discussed and asking for the parent or carer's response within a reasonable timeframe. It could be included that if no response is received within the timeframe then it will be assumed that they have decided not to go ahead with their request.

6 Depending on the response the headteacher should write again to the parent or carer, explaining next steps – either that the pupil will attend all aspects for the lessons or how the withdrawal will be arranged. It would be worth pointing out what specifically the withdrawal refers to and what it does not e.g. it may not need to be for an entire lesson, and during the time of withdrawal that further, alternative work will be set for the pupil.

7 Should there be a further issue or complaint after this – contact Wandsworth/Richmond/Kingston Local Authority for advice and guidance.

Written communication with parents and carers

The following sample letters are intended as a suggested template only, as you will need to reflect your own specific practice and write a letter which best suits your school community and situation.

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**Sample letter 1** Letter to parents and carers to introduce the topics for the year

Dear Parent/ Carer

Re: Relationships Education (and Relationships& Sex Education if applicable) and Health Education information session for parents and carers

As you will be aware, Relationships Education (and Relationships& Sex Education if applicable) and Health Education form an important part of the Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education programme at (name of school). PSHE education is the curriculum subject that gives children the knowledge, understanding, attitudes and practical skills to live safe, healthy, productive lives and meet their full potential.

As you will know, today there is a large amount of information about relationships and puberty in the media which children encounter as they use the internet and watch television, which is not made for children or put into an appropriate context. This can sometimes make an already confusing time seem even more complicated.

If students are provided with information about their bodies and relationships that is developed specially for them and delivered from a source that can be trusted to be appropriate to their needs at the stage of development they are at, they can make their transition into adulthood with the knowledge to understand what is happening to them, and grow into confident and healthy adults able to make positive choices. School is best placed to provide this information in the right way, and it is now compulsory that schools do this for their pupils.

Relationships Education (and Relationships& Sex Education if applicable) and Health Education is also essential in supporting schools to meet their safeguarding duty of care for all pupils. This year, classroom teachers will be using a wide range of child-friendly, age-appropriate resources to deliver these topics in the most suitable way for our children.

We will be running an information session for parents and carers about this topic on (date) at (time) in (venue).

During this session we will explain the kind of topics covered, how the lessons will be structured and give a chance for parents and carers to view the teaching materials we will be using. As part of the evening we will also discuss how you can best support your child when discussing these topics at home.

*(Also consider adding, if this is the case - As a school community we are committed to working in partnership with parents and carers, and recent parental feedback has indicated that the overwhelming majority of parents continue to be impressed by and supportive of the RSHE teaching at our school.)*

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

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Pupil name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

I am / am not able to attend the Relationships Education and Health Education information session on (date)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Parent / Carer Print name \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample letter 2** Response to letter requesting withdrawal from any part of the school Relationships Education, (and Relationships and Sex Education if applicable) and/or Health Education curriculum

Dear Parent / Carer

Thank you for writing to me to express your request to withdraw your son/daughter/ward from lessons relating to the statutory curriculum for Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education.

In order to discuss your request, please contact (name/role) to arrange to come in and meet with me in person so that we can discuss your concerns in more detail and I can take you through the topics about which you are concerned, show you the materials we use in class and explain your rights more fully to you.

I look forward to meeting with you on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

**Sample letter 3** Letter expressing regret that parents or carers wish to exercise their right to withdraw from Sex Education as taught by schools and defining what this right to withdraw will refer to in specific lessons.

Dear Parent / Carer

It is with regret that I write to acknowledge your formal request for (name of student) to be withdrawn from aspects of the Relationships and Sex Education curriculum. The areas of this topic for which you have the right to request this withdrawal are :

(list specific topics)

As we discussed in our meeting, all other aspects of the curriculum are statutory and the right to withdraw does not apply to them.

During lessons when the above topics are taught (name of pupil) will go to (area of school) where they will be supervised. Please note this may be for either a whole or only part of a particular lesson. During this time they will be set alternative work which they will complete.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Sample letter 4 Letter explaining that the Right to Withdraw does not apply to the topics requested by the parent / carer

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing to follow up our meeting on the (date) at which we discussed your request to exercise the Right to Withdraw your child (name) from some lessons within our RSHE curriculum, namely (insert relevant details here).

As we discussed, these topics are covered under the (Relationships Education / Health Education / National Curriculum for Science) and the Right to Withdraw pupils from these lessons does not apply to them. Consequently (name) will study these topics along with his/her classmates, in accordance with government guidance on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

## Sample letter 5 – Sharing Resources

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing to acknowledge your request to view the resources that the school uses to teach RSHE. In order to do this please go to our parent portal on the school's website, where you will find a representative sample of the resources that are used in class. These resources are used to inform pupils about the topics required by the Department for Education in the statutory guidance regarding these subjects, and pupils are expected to show respect and consideration for others during any discussion on the lesson's topic.

Should you wish to see any resources for any particular aspect of the curriculum that is not represented on the website please let me know and I will arrange for you to be able to view them. Please note that in viewing these resources you are agreeing as a condition of access that the content may not be copied or shared further, in accordance with copyright law.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

### Useful links for further guidance and information

DfE Guidance on Engaging parents with Relationships education this has not been updated

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engaging-parents-with-relationships-education-policy>

PSHE Association Guide for Supporting Families not yet updated

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/relationships-education-and-rse-guides-supporting>

## Section 4 Some Policy Advice

Specific advice on developing a policy for RSE can be found in the 'Developing a Policy' section of the updated guidance (pages 4-5). Schools are not required to publish a policy for health education although it is recommended as good practice that schools should set out some of the details about how health education will be taught.

According to the updated guidance an RSE policy should –

- Set out the subject content, how and when it will be taught and who is responsible for teaching it, including any external providers the school will use
- Differentiate between relationships and sex education (where sex education is taught) so that parents have clear information. Relationships education does not involve explaining the detail of different forms of sexual activity, but can cover sensitive topics such as sexual violence, in order to keep children safe.
- Include information about a parent/carer's right to request their child is withdrawn from sex education
- Explain how the content will be made accessible to all pupils including those with SEND
- Describe how the subject is monitored and evaluated
- Set out how parents can view curriculum materials
- Explain how teachers will answer questions in sex education that the school does not cover (in primary) or that relates to sex education from which the child has been withdrawn
- Explain how the policy has been produced and how and when it will be reviewed.

A whole-school approach to well-being and positive relationships is advised by the updated guidance as a means to best deliver the curriculum. Consequently, schools may wish to continue to cross reference RSHE to other policies within the school as appropriate. Such policies might include :

- Safeguarding / Child Protection policy
- E-safety / acceptable use policy
- Equalities policy
- Behaviour policy
- British values policy
- SEND policy
- Citizenship policy
- Science policy
- Physical health and mental wellbeing policy
- Any other relevant policy within the school

## Section 5 – OFSTED requirements

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health education

‘are part of the basic school curriculum. Which allows schools flexibility in developing their planned programme, integrated within a broad and balanced curriculum. Key aspects of RSHE are in scope for OFSTED inspection for example through inspectors’ consideration of pupils personal development, behaviour and welfare, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’ are part of the basic school curriculum.

DfE Guidance on RSE – July 2025 page 2 section 3

There is no specific ‘grade’ for Relationships Education, Relationships & Sex Education and Health Education but the teaching of it and the impact this makes on pupils’ learning will be looked at and form part of the judgements as above.

As always, OFSTED will be looking to see the impact of any teaching in these areas and thought should be given within a school as how to evidence this e.g. pre- and post-topic pupil skills audit or statistics regarding the reporting of and dealing with e.g. homophobic bullying, and the impact lessons may have made on reducing these.

It is important for schools to consider that the subject is taught by qualified, teaching staff trained in the delivery of the curriculum, and that any lessons should be thoroughly planned, prepared, resourced and evaluated. This can be evidenced by schemes of work, examples of student work / responses and teacher marking/comments/evaluations. It should have a designated subject lead who should be a member of the teaching staff and this post should be a ‘lead’ rather than a ‘co-ordinator’.

As with other areas of the curriculum, Relationships Education, Relationships & Sex Education and Health Education will require a statement of curriculum intent, and the learning map should indicate a clear sequencing of the topics studied, revisited at age-appropriate intervals. Schools should be able to demonstrate how they have engaged pupils in their development of the curriculum.

Budgeting for these subjects should allow for sufficient resourcing and staff training to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Useful links for further guidance and information

Education Inspection Framework for use from November 2025 – page 44

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework-for-use-from-november-2025>

Inspection Toolkits

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b9a6b8b0a373a01819fe4b/Schools\\_inspection\\_toolkit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b9a6b8b0a373a01819fe4b/Schools_inspection_toolkit.pdf)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewed-education-inspection-framework-supporting-evidence-base/education-inspection-toolkits-statutory-and-non-statutory-guidance-professional-standards-and-relevant-research>

## Section 6 – Multi-faith responses

There may be some concerns raised regarding the statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships & Sex Education and Health Education in schools following the updated guidance.

Wandsworth Local Authority has liaised with the Wandsworth Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and the Wandsworth Multi-Faith group who have discussed the new guidance and have given support to its implementation and delivery in our schools. – this needs checking and Kingston and Richmond arrangements included

It would be helpful here to know what Wandsworth / Kingston / Richmond SACREs are doing – does anyone have any contacts for these ?

However, some parents and carers may not fully understand what Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education or Health Education cover and may express concerns with reference to their own personal faith backgrounds.

Responses by faith bodies and resources used in faith-based schools may be useful when dealing with concerns from parents and carers regarding issues to do with religion. Here are some links to resources created and used with the express agreement of designated faith organisations you may find useful.

Church of England

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/relationships-sex-and-health-education>

Roman Catholic – Ten Ten

<https://www.tentenresources.co.uk>

Islam – Association of Muslim Schools

<https://ams-uk.org/rse-hub/>

Judaism - Streetwise

<https://www.streetwisegb.org/rse>

RE online

<https://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DfE-RSHE-framework-with-teachings-from-Jewish-Christian-and-Muslim-people-from-SECONDARY-schools.pdf>

## Section 7 – Health Education

Whilst the new guidance from the DfE is focused on relationships and sex education, it acknowledges the great deal of overlap between the topics designated as RSE and those covered in the government guidance on Physical Health and Mental Well-being, which tasks schools to give pupils the information that they need to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing, enabling them to develop the skills they need to make positive choices, recognise when issues arise and know how to seek support as early as possible from appropriate sources. Resilience is one such skill, which can help pupils to become confident in their ability to achieve well and persevere even when they encounter setbacks or when their goals are distant, and to respond calmly and rationally to setbacks and challenges.

As with RSE, schools have the flexibility to design and plan age-appropriate subject content, but government guidance sets out core areas for health and wellbeing that are appropriate for primary and secondary aged pupils. Topics for Health Education are set out clearly in the government guidance on Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing, and there are clear areas of overlap with RSE, and so these subjects are often taught in an integrated way as RSHE.

Topics which fall specifically within the remit of Health Education include –

- Puberty / menstruation / the changing adolescent body
- Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing
- The benefits of exercise, healthy eating and good nutrition, sufficient sleep
- Developing the knowledge and language of emotions, feelings and the development of their bodies
- Hygiene and self-care
- Sexual health, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV prevention
- The benefits of hobbies, interests and participation in community/social activity
- The difficulties and problems caused by isolation, bullying (including cyber bullying)
- Basic first aid and calling appropriate emergency services
- Healthy online habits, including discerning internet searching and possible internet harms and dangers
- Harms posed by drugs, alcohol, tobacco and obesity
- Facts around dental health, sun damage, allergies, immunisation, vaccination

Health Education shares RSE's emphasis on the importance of enabling pupils to make well-informed, positive choices for themselves.

The Government advice for Health Education can be found here-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/physical-health-and-mental-wellbeing-primary-and-secondary>

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## Section 8 - Local Authority Key Contacts / reporting requests to exercise the right to withdraw

Wandsworth, Kingston and Richmond Local Authorities are keen to support schools in their implementation and delivery of Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education in accordance with statutory guidance.

Should schools receive requests to exercise the right to withdraw students, or experience targeting through pre-prepared letters requesting withdrawal, the Local Authority would like to be informed of these, and support where they can.

This is a list of personnel and departments to contact should there be an issue raised at your school.

**Please can colleagues identify who these people or departments are and give us the correct contact information?**

Department	Key Personnel	Contact details

## Section 9 – Useful links

### **General**

NEU

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/classroom/relationships-sex-and-health-education-rshe>

Sex Education Forum

<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk>

PSHE association

<https://pshe-association.org.uk/search?queryTerm=RSHE>

Stonewall

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/best-practice-toolkits-resources>

1 Decision

<https://www.1decision.co.uk>

Brook Learn

<https://learn.brook.org.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=2489>

Heartsmart TV

<https://www.heartsmartv.com/carousel/videos/trailer-new-april-2021>

Jigsaw

<https://jigsawpshe.online>

Christopher Winter Project

<https://www.teachsre.co.uk/cwp-resources>

SEND focus

<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/news/blog/2026-rshe-guidance-and-teaching-learners-send>

### **Masculinities**

Male Allies UK

<https://www.maleallies.co.uk>

The Voice of the Boys report

<https://www.maleallies.co.uk/voice-of-the-boys-report/>

M-Path

<https://m-path.co.uk>

Boyz-2-Men

<https://boyz-2-men.org.uk>

Progressive Masculinities

<https://progressivemasculinity.co.uk>

Josh Sargent – (16 year old student online campaigner)

<https://www.joshssargent.co.uk>

SWGfL 'Incel Culture' Update (2025): <https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/updated-rshe-guidance-aims-to-tackle-incel-culture/>

Brook

<https://www.brook.org.uk/education/teaching-about-misogyny-masculinity-and-stereotypes/>

End Violence Against Women Coalition Commentary (2025)

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/new-rshe-guidance-to-address-porn-misogyny-and-vawg/>

#### **AI / Internet relevant**

The Molly Rose foundation

<https://mollyrosefoundation.org>

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

UK Safer Internet Centre

<https://www.iwf.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/uk-safer-internet-centre/>

UK Council for Child Internet Safety

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis>

SWGfL

<https://swgfl.org.uk>

#### **Marriage, Sex and Relationships**

Lovewise

<https://lovewise.org.uk>

Childnet

<https://www.childnet.com/resources/pshe-toolkit/myth-vs-reality/>

LGBTQ+

Stonewall

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/shaping-policy/dont-repeat-history-protect-lgbtq-inclusive-education/guidance-for-inclusive-rhse-in-schools>

Pop n Olly

<https://www.popnolly.com>

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## Section 10 – Key Vocabulary

Under the new guidance pupils are encouraged to be taught to use the proper terminology in RSHE, in order for them to be informed of what this is and to promote clear understanding, reduce stigma, and ensure they can communicate effectively. Correct terminology builds a foundation for understanding complex topics, helps children make informed choices, and provides them with the language to discuss their physical and mental health with confidence and respect. From defining terms accurately to fostering inclusivity, the words we choose and use in the PSHE classroom can have a profound impact on our students and their understanding.

Development of confident use of correct terminology can empower pupils, and help to reduce the risk of potential discomfort and division. Further, a key vocabulary list for parents/carers can help them to be aware of what vocabulary is used at school and reinforce its use at home. This may be particularly helpful for families whose first language is not English.

Schools may wish to compile a list of key vocabulary for circulation to parents/carers, or post it on their website. Advice on compiling a list is available to members of the PSHE Association, and 'Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth Local Authorities **may be able to help fund membership costs for schools in their area.**- please let us know the details to include here

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## Northern Ireland Religious Education Supreme Court case

### Summary

- The Christian-focused religious education (RE) taught in schools in Northern Ireland is unlawful, the Supreme Court has ruled
- The case was taken by an unnamed father and his daughter who attended a state-controlled primary school in Belfast
- She had received Christian religious education and took part in Christian worship, but her parents did not want her to be taught that Christianity was an absolute truth
- The court ruled that RE in Northern Ireland is not being approached in an "objective, critical and pluralistic" manner, adding that the current syllabus amounted to pursuing the aim of indoctrination
- The ruling is not going to mean that RE will no longer be taught in schools, but is likely to mean that pupils will be taught more about other faiths as well as Christianity

### BBC news article (accessed 12/1/26)

Supreme Court rules Christian-focused RE taught in NI schools is unlawful

The UK's highest court came to an unanimous judgement

By **Robbie Meredith**, Education correspondent and **Lucy Carlin**, BBC News NI

- Published 19 November 2025

**The Christian religious education (RE) taught in schools in Northern Ireland is unlawful, the UK Supreme Court has ruled.**

In a unanimous judgement the UK's highest court allowed an appeal by an unnamed father and daughter from Northern Ireland.

[In 2022, the High Court in Belfast ruled](#) that the Christian-based RE taught at primary schools in Northern Ireland was unlawful. However, the Department of Education (DE) subsequently won an appeal against that judgement.

But on Wednesday the Supreme Court unanimously allowed the father and daughter's subsequent appeal and dismissed the Department's cross-appeal.

A spokesperson for The Department of Education said: "We will carefully consider the complex judgement and its implications and will provide advice to schools in the near future."

- [As it happened: Family wins appeal in UK Supreme Court over religious education](#)

### Details of the case

The father and daughter challenged the legality of the teaching of RE and the practice of collective worship in the primary school which she attended between the ages of four and seven.

The proceedings involved points of law which affected those involved in this case as well as the teaching of RE and the practice of collective worship more generally in Northern Ireland.

The Supreme Court heard that withdrawing the 11-year-old girl from RE and worship would have left her "stigmatised" – because, for example, she would have been the only pupil in her class not to take part.

These factors led the court to rule that the right to withdrawal placed an "undue burden" on parents.

The ruling says the RE syllabus needs to be revised

The Supreme Court backed the original High Court judgement from 2022 which held that as both RE and collective worship in the school followed the core syllabus specified by the DE - they were not conveyed in "an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner".

The court said the judgement "was not about secularism in the education system" and made clear that "no one is suggesting that RE should not be provided in schools in Northern Ireland".

The court said: "The family strongly support the provision of religious education provided it does not amount to indoctrination."

### What led to this legal action?

The legal action was taken by a father and his daughter who attended a Belfast primary school. The family took the case anonymously.

In a state-controlled school, the girl received non-denominational Christian religious education and took part in Christian worship.

However, her parents did not wish her to be taught that Christianity was an absolute truth.

In 2019, they wrote to the school voicing concerns that it did not conform with their own beliefs.

The family asked if inspection mechanisms were in place to ensure that pupils were receiving a balanced religious education.

The school replied that its religious education was "Bible-based" and followed the core syllabus for education.

The family argued that their rights, which requires the State providing education to "respect the right of parents to ensure such education is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions", had been contravened.

Darragh Mackin from Phoenix Law who acted on behalf of the father and daughter, said the decision was "a watershed moment for educational rights in this jurisdiction".

"The judgement makes clear that the state cannot rely on withdrawal mechanisms to justify religious instruction."

Mr Mackin continued: "Schools must not place children in the impossible position of being singled out or stigmatised simply because their families do not share the religious worldview embedded in the curriculum."

Speaking to the BBC's Evening Extra programme, he said it "is probably the single most important legal decision for education certainly in the last century."

Bishop Donal McKeown told BBC News NI he is "quite sanguine" about the ruling, and its implications.

"I think it's not unsurprising at this stage in our history," he said.

"Northern Ireland has changed a lot since the last core curriculum was put together and I think it is certainly a time for a revision of what we teach and how we teach as the core curriculum. So in that sense, I'm quite sanguine about the whole thing."

Bishop McKeown said "there are questions to be asked", adding he is positive about "the need for a new RE core curriculum" and is "quite open" to seeing where this goes.

"I'm looking forward to the next stage of the journey, I don't see it as a negative thing. There are many points to be clarified - this is an opportunity for all of us to be involved in renewing the RE curriculum to enable us to create a healthy, forward-looking society."

### **'Clarity and direction'**

Reverend Andrew Forster, the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe and Chair of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) said the TRC noted the judgement and "will take some time to consider the ruling".

"The judgement brings a long court process to a conclusion and once the ruling is considered, we hope it will provide clarity and direction in respect of both the teaching of religious education and collective worship in schools."

### **'Our schools should represent everyone'**

There has also been reaction to the ruling from political parties.

Green party councillor Anthony Flynn congratulated the family and said the ruling "is hugely significant, and can't be ignored by the [Northern Ireland] Executive."

"No child in a publicly-funded school should be pushed into a religious worldview that isn't theirs. Northern Ireland is changing, our communities are diverse, and our education system needs to reflect that."

Flynn said RE "should be balanced, inclusive and modern" and that this "is a chance to finally update NI's education framework so every child feels welcome and respected".

"It's 2025. Our schools should represent everyone," he added.

### **'We remain steadfast'**

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MP Carla Lockhart said the Supreme Court ruling was "bitterly disappointing" and "very concerning".

"I obviously don't want to force religion down anyone's throat, but we do have protection in Northern Ireland" for parental choice, she told the [BBC's Evening Extra programme](#), adding that parents "can remove your children from such lessons".

She said the ruling will have "ramifications" for education in Northern Ireland, but that her party "will not be deterred from promoting and preserving Christian values and teaching in schools".

Alliance Party assembly member Nick Mathison who chairs Stormont's education committee, said "this is not about stopping the teaching of RE".

"This is about making sure that the religious education delivered in schools is critical, objective and pluralistic.

"We live in a diverse community," he said, adding: "This is just about making sure our schools are inclusive spaces."

He said there should be "space" for Christian collective worship, as well as "space for other approaches and other views".

In a post on social media, David Smyth, from the Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, said: "While we acknowledge there will be many questions and concerns from Christian parents and those involved in education, this is not a moment for fear.

"There is an opportunity here to re-imagine how we engage with education, teach and share Christianity with young people in new and fresh ways."

### **Analysis: 'Some things are likely to change'**

**By Robbie Meredith, Education and arts correspondent, BBC News NI:**

This started with the experience of one family and has led to what is a very, very significant judgement.

The child went to primary school and her parents noticed that when the child was coming home and eating, she was saying her prayers before meals.

They were a non-religious family - they didn't have any strong religious beliefs - and they asked: "Why?"

The child basically said this is what she had been taught to do in school.

It is important to be clear that the Supreme Court ruling is not going to mean that the teaching of RE in schools will end, or that there will be no more hymns or prayers in school assemblies.

But it does mean that some things are likely to change.

The judges said that was "a complete absence of plurality in relation to the teachings or practices of any other religions or non-religious traditions and philosophies," especially in primary schools.

So in future children are likely to be taught about a range of religions in RE, not just Christianity, from the earliest years of primary school.

Schools may also have to think about inviting a wider range of speakers to school assemblies, not just Christian ministers or organisations.

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## Proposed Public Faith Walk Discussion Points

### Background Planning:

I had a meeting with Richard Smart who has organised two “Walks in Faith” for Merton, with a third going ahead this year.

2024 – Wimbledon/ Southfields area, met at Wimbledon station. 100 to start, more joined at churches.

2025 – 8 venues, starting at Merton Civic Centre 10- 11am, ending Shree Ganapathy temple– 5.pm; 5 miles, 75 attendees. Bus for disabled. 75 walkers.

2026 – Mitcham currently in planning

### Key points:

- Charge £5, proceeds to Merton homeless charity (Faith in Action).
- Walks are on Saturdays.
- Safety - Police accompanied, plus marshals to cross roads. Risk assessment done.
- Lunch and refreshments at venues.
- Approx. 15 mins talk by host at venue, followed by 15 minutes look around.
- Advertised in advance by cards in libraries, local places of worship etc. Participants registered at the first venue.
- Photographer offered to come to last walk and it is well documented – see link: [Interfaith Walk — Contemporary Religious & Spiritual Experience: An Illustrated Guide](#) — Contemporary Religious & Spiritual Experience: An Illustrated Guide

### Wandsworth walk suggestions

- Route to use known venues from the primary faith trails.
- A Saturday in September or July gives a chance of good weather and avoids holidays.
- Good to start somewhere like the Town Hall/Civic suite, then for example visit Friends meeting House, Southfields gurdwara, El Fazl mosque, St Paul’s church, Wimbledon synagogue and Buddhapadipa temple. This combines the Wimbledon and Southfields primary faith trails. Perhaps add the Nunciature on Parkside?
- An alternative trail could start at the Khalsa Centre in Tooting, visit St Anselm’s RC Church, Balham Seventh-day Adventist church, St Mary and John the Divine CE church, Balham mandir, Balham mosque and Balham Baptist church.
- Choose a Wandsworth charity to support – the Mayor’s perhaps or local homeless?
- Involve Wandsworth’s PR/comms – Brightside.

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