

Religious Education in England: An overview

Religious Education (RE) forms part of the basic curriculum for all state-funded primary and secondary schools in England, through to the end of sixth form. It is statutory, but it is not currently part of the National Curriculum. Schools must provide RE for all registered pupils, subject to the right of withdrawal.

The curriculum that applies depends on the type of school. Maintained community schools and voluntary controlled schools normally teach RE according to the locally agreed syllabus adopted by the local authority. Voluntary aided schools with a religious character normally teach RE in accordance with their trust deed, although can choose to follow the locally agreed syllabus. Academies and free schools must provide RE under their funding agreements; the detailed requirements vary according to whether the school has a religious designation and, for some converter academies, the status of the predecessor school.

Agreed syllabuses are developed locally through an Agreed Syllabus Conference, with advice and oversight from the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The Education Act 1996 requires every agreed syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. Case law also requires the state to take care that curriculum knowledge is conveyed in a pluralistic way, with equal respect for religious and non-religious convictions. This means that RE in schools without a religious character must include appropriate study of both religious and non-religious worldviews.

Parents retain the legal right to withdraw their child from all or part of RE, and pupils aged 18 or over may withdraw themselves. RE is distinct from collective worship, although the right of withdrawal applies to both.

In November 2025 the Curriculum and Assessment review proposed placing RE within the National Curriculum subject to consensus being reached by the RE community. In summer the Secretary of State announced that this consensus had been reached therefore RE going in the National Curriculum would be part of the wider consultation on the new curriculum. This consultation is currently expected to begin in November 2026.

If this is agreed it would represent a significant change to the legal framework. At present, however, these proposals have not replaced the existing statutory arrangements described above.

Useful links

- [Curriculum and Assessment Review: final report and government response](#)
- [OFSTED: Research review series: religious education](#)
- [Ofsted: Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#)
- [Department for Education: RE and collective worship in academies and free schools](#)
- [Education Act 1996, section 375: agreed syllabuses of religious education](#)
- [High Court judgment: R \(Fox\) v Secretary of State for Education](#)