

Review by Derek Holloway

Guidance on Managing the Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education

Produced on behalf of WASACRE by Gill Vaisey.

This is an excellent publication that is a must for every school leader and adviser in the country. The book has been produced on behalf of WASACRE (Wales Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) but it draws on the advice and insight of a range of faith communities and non-religious organisations as well as experts from across Wales and England.

What is particularly effective is the design and layout of the book. It is all colour coded and divided in to clear short chapters meaning that it is ideal as a quick reference guide. No need to go thumbing through the pages of circular 1/94 and associated documents all that schools and advisers need to know is laid out in an accessible way.

Chapters cover what you might expect, background to the right of withdrawal, the legal situation, how to manage request to withdraw etc but several sections that you might not expect. There is a very useful and topical chapter on managing request for withdrawal when this request is based on prejudice and when this becomes a 'Hate incident' and when it is not. This will be invaluable for schools.

Another helpful feature is the comprehensive guide to the views of this groups likely to exercise the right of withdrawal and what their concerns might be. Here it is clear that the advice and views of those communities has been sought and reflected in a respectful way. There is also a section on how to take simple steps to minimise the likelihood of parents being concerned.

Throughout there are examples and case studies drawn in a very balanced way from a range of faith and non-religious contexts. I found most of these helpful and authentic, although one case study of some particularly militant atheists parents didn't seem to give a clear steer to schools.

That minor quibble apart I would thoroughly recommend this publication to advisers working in all types of schools. If it were purchased by all senior leaders in the country it would significantly reduce the workload of RE and other school advisers who, in my experience, spend a disproportionate amount of their time advising schools on this issue.

Excellent though this publication is it remains my hope that we can soon make a legal change that will remove the right of withdrawal from the statue books making this book redundant. However, in the meantime this is an invaluable aid that has the potential to minimise the complications and concerns the right of withdrawal brings.

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