

## GATEWAY DOCUMENT 3.5

# Handling complaints arising from RE lessons fairly and effectively

## WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

Schools need to ensure that RE is of educational value to all students, whatever their belief background, thus reducing the likelihood of complaints or requests for withdrawal. It is also important that teachers have confidence that any complaints will be handled fairly by the school or they may be deterred from addressing the kinds of contentious issue that might otherwise be of interest to both teachers and students. If parents/carers are kept informed about RE from the start they are more likely to understand why controversial issues are addressed in RE and less likely to complain or withdraw their children. Information provision and communication are central to achieving this.

## KEY QUESTIONS

### What classroom challenges might arise in RE?

Some teachers may find it difficult when parents express negative or prejudiced views about certain religious or non-religious groups. Parents may complain if such views are challenged in RE lessons and their attitudes may make their complaints more difficult to handle. Parents/carers will not all share the values which underpin work in RE, i.e. that all participants are worthy of respect and can expect to be listened to even if others disagree with them.

Some parents/carers may not wish their children to learn about faiths other than their own.

### How can teachers address such challenges?

- By dealing with any misunderstandings about RE, for example by making it clear that the subject is religious *education* not religious *instruction*. It should be explained that RE is an open, exploratory subject that does not assume faith or belief.
- By teaching about religions and beliefs in a fair and accurate way, allowing students to learn in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values.

- By ensuring that the teaching of RE does not appear to set out to undermine or ignore the role of families and religious or belief communities.
- By developing good relationships with parents/carers so that minor issues do not turn into full-blown complaints (e.g. by responding promptly to any enquiry).
- By following correct school procedures when a complaint is made.
- By discussing religious beliefs and practices with parents and carers when appropriate.
- By inviting parents/carers to key RE events in school, including visits out to places of worship.
- By presenting a positive image of the subject, for example through informative RE displays at open days and parents' evenings.

## NEXT STEPS

### Signposts for further reading

Religious education in English schools: Non statutory guidance 2010

[www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/subjects/a0064886/religious-education-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/subjects/a0064886/religious-education-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010)

### Signposts for further resources

<http://www.nasacre.org.uk/> The school's local Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE) may be able to offer guidance and support – The NASACRE website contains contact details for them all.

### Signposts for further action

The school could consider:

- how it can be open to hearing and understanding possible tensions within and between the communities served by the school;
- the importance of having a clear policy for RE available for parents/carers, outlining the nature, objectives and content of RE and being clear about parents'/carers' rights of withdrawal;
- the need to recognise that withdrawal from RE may be a satisfactory solution for some parents/carers and requests should be handled in a sensitive and non-discriminatory way;
- the importance of making all staff and parents/carers aware of the school's complaints procedure.