

Hampshire SACRE advice for schools

Issues relating to religion and faith



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Hampshire SACRE advice for schools

The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) supports the effective provision of religious education (RE) and collective worship in schools. SACRE works with the local authority to review existing provision of RE and promote community cohesion. Hampshire SACRE comprises four groups, representing religions other than the Church of England, the Church of England, teachers' associations, and the local authority, and also a number of co-opted members. Hampshire SACRE members have contributed to the information included in this advice document and recommend it to Hampshire schools.

This document aims to give advice to schools on issues relating to religion and faith that may occasionally arise. Within the world of religion and beliefs there are many differing points of view, even within one religion. Therefore, it is important to remember when there is an issue that it may be one set of parents and not one religion. This is not intended to be a definitive document, but rather it seeks to highlight some of the issues that there might be in a school and to give ideas about how to respond.

Hampshire SACRE encourages all children to be interested in other religions and to want to know more, while being secure in their own beliefs. Therefore, RE in Hampshire schools does not seek to indoctrinate the child, but to help them find out more about the communities in which they live and about the world around them.

Hampshire SACRE encourages schools to communicate effectively with parents/carers about collective worship and RE and, in this way, many concerns will be alleviated. Hampshire SACRE also encourages schools to communicate with governors about RE and collective worship and to discuss the school's approach with them.

Where issues arise, Hampshire SACRE's advice for all schools is to be flexible and to seek a solution that is relevant to the local community. In all cases, the first approach should be to have a conversation with the parents/carers about the issue raised and then to seek a solution, after having given careful consideration and taking further advice if necessary.

This approach underpins rights respecting education, with particular reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In particular, article 14, *“Every child has the right to think and believe what they want and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights of parents to give their children information about this right”* and article 30, *“Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, regardless of whether these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live”*.

Legally it is unlawful to discriminate (directly or indirectly), victimise or harass a pupil or prospective pupil by treating them less favourably on the basis of their religion or belief. The content of the school curriculum is excluded from Equalities legislation, however, the way in which a school provides education – the delivery of the curriculum – is explicitly included. Any questions on the practical application of the Equalities Act in respect of issues of religion and belief can be addressed by Hampshire Legal Services.

At the end of this advice document you will find a short summary of the following areas, which the Hampshire RE Team has received questions about from schools:

- Jehovah's Witness beliefs
- Plymouth Brethren beliefs
- The Five Pillars of Islam as the foundation of Muslim beliefs

- Muslim religious festivals, including those specifically for Shia Muslims
- The five Ks of Sikhism
- Humanism.

This is not intended to be a definitive list, but aims to help schools plan for some of the areas they may receive queries about. The document will be reviewed by Hampshire SACRE from year to year.

Further contributions to this document are welcome as it is reviewed. We hope you find it useful and that it raises your awareness about some of the issues that may arise and how to respond. Contact details can be found at the end of the document.

Clothing

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
Clothing relating to modesty, belief or religion.	A parent might request this as part of their religious belief and this is not linked to just one religion – it can be important in several religions. The clothing may well be seen as part of the child's identity, so a request needs to be considered with acknowledgment of this.	<p>A school's response should consider individual needs here along with the school's uniform policy to see if the request can be accommodated with some adjustments, for example on colour or material.</p> <p>Physical education (PE) and health and safety concerns also need to be considered, as clothing may need to be removed or adapted to be safe for exercise. These concerns should be discussed with parents/carers.</p> <p>If the clothing is related to identity (for example, a Sikh child wanting to wear the five Ks), then detailed conversations need to be had with the parents/carers about the use of these within school.</p>

Jewellery

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>Jewellery that parents/carers request being worn as part of religious belief.</p>	<p>This request is not just limited to one religion. Christian families may request their child wear a cross; Greek or Russian Orthodox parents may want their child to carry an icon; Sikh parents may want their child to have the five Ks on their person at all times; Hindu parents may request their child wear a bracelet linked to a religious festival or for a blessing, for a time-limited period.</p>	<p>It is important for schools to decide whether an item requested is essential for the religion or belief or whether it is something that is desirable. For example, the cross is not a requirement for all Christians. However, a Sikh family may require their child to wear the five Ks at school and may want to discuss this with you. Schools are advised to check their jewellery policy and see what can be allowed. For example, a small icon or cross on a chain may be permissible providing it is covered up. Regulations for PE need to be discussed with the parents/carers and either the jewellery taken off or covered up; for example, a sweat band over a Kara (Sikh bracelet).</p>
<p>Jewellery linked to a cause or charity.</p>	<p>Some parents/carers may have a strong belief about Remembrance or have ties to a particular charity, which is affiliated to a religious belief.</p>	<p>It may be advisable to insert a phrase into the school's jewellery policy to cover requests such as these, linked to the school's health and safety policy. A meeting with the parents/carers is advised so that the reasons for the request are understood.</p> <p>It is also advisable that policies on the school's website are checked to ensure that they do not hold conflicting information for parents/carers.</p>

Curriculum

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>A parent/carer may request a child be withdrawn from the curriculum areas that conflict with their own beliefs.</p>	<p>For example, parents/carers may disagree with the teaching of evolution in Year 6 science, or the references to magic in English reading.</p> <p>Some parents/carers may not wish their child to take part in artistic activities that conflict with their beliefs, such as drawing God or a religious person, making Christmas decorations, drawing Father Christmas or making birthday cards (for example, parents/carers who are Jehovah's Witness).</p>	<p>The law on withdrawal for children only applies to taught RE, collective worship and sex and relationships education (SRE). It does not apply to the rest of the curriculum. Therefore, any parental or carer concerns should be discussed with parents/carers, whilst making clear the position of the school.</p> <p>With regard to artistic activities, the school can consider making alterations for the child that still are in line with the general theme of the lesson – for example, drawing a religious scene without having to draw God.</p>
<p>Storage of religious resources.</p>	<p>School staff will need to show and help children interact with religious resources as part of their education – for example, reading and discussing religious books, looking at religious icons and artefacts of value to a religious person.</p>	<p>Schools should discuss with their staff how to store these and advise children on how to handle them. It is important that children are taught that artefacts should be treated with the utmost respect and used for educational purposes as much as possible.</p>
<p>PE – swimming and modesty.</p>	<p>A parent/carer might have concerns about their child attending swimming lessons due to their beliefs.</p>	<p>Schools should consider the arrangements made for the children in terms of male and female staffing and changing arrangements. Swimming is part of the PE curriculum, however, and withdrawal from it is not allowed.</p>

Collective worship

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>Parents/carers who want to withdraw their child from collective worship.</p>	<p>A parent/carer might be concerned about their child saying a prayer or singing a hymn or the content of the collective worship.</p>	<p>By law, schools must have a daily act of collective worship and the school cannot withdraw children for their own reasons but a parent/carer may withdraw their child.</p> <p>It is important for a school to consider their collective worship policy and the content of collective worship that is most appropriate for their school. It is important to decide what is worship and what is not so that a school can communicate to parents/carers. Schools should make it clear that children will be invited to respond in a way appropriate for them, for example silence, meditation or joining in a prayer.</p> <p>The structure of collective worship will also need to be considered as the focus of some collective worship may be more of an issue for a parent/carer than others (for example, a collective worship that focuses on the Bible rather than one that focuses on school values alone).</p> <p>Schools may want to consider inviting parents/carers in to observe a collective worship (not just a celebratory assembly at the end of the week) so that parents/carers can see the structure of a typical collective worship.</p> <p>For Hampshire schools, a collective worship guidance document is available from the County RE Centre.</p> <p>A church school will also need to consult the Diocesan policy for worship as well as county guidelines.</p>

Dietary needs

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>A parent/carer may want to help their child fast for a particular reason.</p>	<p>A common reason for this may be the family wanting the child to experience some or all of Ramadan if they are Muslim.</p> <p>Others may want their child to give up something (for example, meat for Lent).</p>	<p>A discussion is advised as soon as possible with the family to find out what the family wants and what the school can or cannot accommodate. The length of the school day and the type of activities the child takes part in need to be discussed (such as sport if the child is fasting).</p>
<p>A parent may want to encourage their child to adopt a vegetarian or other diet as part of following family values.</p>	<p>It may be important to a family to help their child adopt the same values to food as they have and they may seek the school's help in achieving this.</p>	<p>This issue should be discussed with the school meal providers to alleviate any concerns and to meet the family needs as far as reasonably practical.</p> <p>Schools may also want to consider where in the school curriculum they teach about dietary requirements in relation to religions. For example, are children aware of foods that are kosher if they are studying Judaism?</p>
<p>Other families may want their child to eat separately from others because of their religious beliefs.</p>	<p>It may be important for a family that the school accommodates this as it is a central feature of their religion.</p>	<p>Parents should discuss the practicalities of this with the parents/carers and consider where the children might eat on a regular basis – for example, an empty classroom or a separate part of the hall. Thought will also need to be given about who is aware of this request, the reasons for it and the implications (for example, lunchtime supervisors). It may be that this will need to be reviewed on a termly basis so that educational trips can be considered well in advance and planned for.</p>

Religious festivals

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>A parent/carer would like to withdraw a child from school for a religious festival or a pilgrimage.</p>	<p>This may well be a requirement of the religion, such as celebrating Eid-al-Adha, Diwali or celebrating Ashura for Shia Muslims.</p>	<p>Careful consideration needs to be given here as any response from the school must take into consideration the advice from the Hampshire Attendance Team before responding to any request. Normally, if it is a religious festival that is central to the religion, then a request for leave is accommodated but usually limited to a day for the attendance.</p> <p>It is important to discuss this with local religious leaders, if possible, or with the Hampshire RE Team.</p> <p>It is also important to share with other schools in a local cluster what your school proposes, as the child's sibling may have been offered something completely different by another school.</p> <p>Hampshire Attendance Team</p> <p>Email: attendance.queries@hants.gov.uk</p>

National celebrations

Areas that may arise	The context	Considerations for the school
<p>Some parents/carers may not wish their child to take part in commemorating national events, such as the Queen's birthday.</p>	<p>A reason for this may be that the parents/carers believe that honour should only be given to God and not to an institution, country or person. For example, Jehovah's Witness families will not celebrate Mother's or Father's Day.</p>	<p>While the school may prepare children to take part in many activities, such as celebrating the Queen's reign, Remembrance or preparations for Mother's Day, it should be remembered that some families may not agree with such events. Schools should also be sensitive to children who may not have a mother or father, or who may be separated from them.</p> <p>A meeting with the parents/carers is advised to help the school understand the concerns of the family and to see what activities are the cause for concern.</p>

Appendix: Beliefs

Jehovah's Witness beliefs

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in God and believe that Jesus was the son of God, but not God Himself. Therefore, they do not believe in the Trinity. They read the Bible and meet in Kingdom Halls locally. The Kingdom Halls do not have icons, religious pictures or crucifixes on display and children will not want to interact with these in school. They do not have priests, but have a body of elders who supervise the congregation. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas because they do not believe there is sufficient basis for the celebration of Christmas in the Bible. Therefore, they may request a child is withdrawn from taught RE lessons about Christmas and does not take part in a nativity. At Easter, Witnesses will commemorate Jesus's death, but not his resurrection, so they may not attend all the Easter activities organised by schools. Jehovah's Witness families do not celebrate birthdays, but will give gifts on different occasions throughout the year. They are required to be politically neutral, but to respect the rights and beliefs of others in all areas, including religious beliefs. Part of this may involve a refusal to take part in a national anthem or saluting a flag, as they believe this may have religious connotations.

Plymouth Brethren beliefs

Plymouth Brethren are a Christian fellowship centred around the teachings of the Bible. Many Plymouth Brethren children attend infant schools, but then move to a Plymouth Brethren school from the end of Key Stage 1. They have a belief that they should only eat or drink with those that they would share the Lord's Supper with, therefore, families may request that their child eats separately at lunchtimes and other

occasions. Female Plymouth Brethren members will wear a headscarf when worshipping and often may wear a headband or ribbon generally.

Muslim beliefs

The foundation of Muslim beliefs are the Five Pillars which bind together all in a worldwide community (the Umma). The pillars are as follows:

- **the Shahadah:** this is the Muslim declaration of faith and is as follows: *"There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (pbuh) is his messenger"*
- **Salah:** the requirement to pray five times a day wherever you are at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening. Prayer is always directed in towards the Ka'ba shrine in Makkah and a prayer mat is used commonly. Muslims may pray at home or at the Mosque and the focus for prayer in the community is the noonday prayers on a Friday
- **Zakah:** Muslims give 2.5% of their surplus income to charity and are also urged to donate additional voluntary payments (Sadaqah)
- **Hajj:** Muslims are required to complete a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime, if they have the money and health to do so. This is completed in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar
- **Sawm:** this is the requirement to fast during the Holy month of Ramadan from just before dawn until sunset. The requirement extends to not eating and drinking anything during this time and extends to all Muslims from the age of puberty (unless ill health prevents this).

Muslim religious festivals

The two major Muslim festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha. Eid-ul-Fitr occurs at the end of Ramadan and this celebration marks the end of fasting and involves the first meal eaten in daylight for a month, as well as thanking Allah for providing the strength to fast for such a long period of time. Muslim families may wish to attend a special celebration and many will wear new clothes and decorate their homes to celebrate this. It is also seen as a time of forgiveness.

Eid-al-Adha is the festival of sacrifice and is the second most important festival for Muslims. It remembers the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)'s willingness to sacrifice his son when asked to by God. In the story, God stops Ibrahim when he is about to kill his son and instead provides a sheep for sacrifice. In many countries the festival is celebrated by the offering of a sheep or goat, which is shared out among family, friends and the poor.

Among Shia Muslims, Ashura is a major religious festival and it is of central importance to them. It commemorates the death of Hussein, son of Imam Ali and grandson of Muhammad (pbuh).

Sikh beliefs

Sikhism is founded upon the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and nine successive Gurus. The 11th Guru is the Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which Sikhs consider the supreme spiritual authority and head of the religion. Practising Sikhs visit the Gurdwara often and they may choose to wear the five Ks of the Khalsa. These are Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb), Kacheera (undergarments), Kara (bracelet) and Kirpan (sword). Sikh families may request that their child wears these when attending school as it is an important part of Sikh identity for some families.

Humanism

Humanists aim to bring non-religious people together in order to help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world. They are people who, therefore, do not believe in God and an afterlife, but instead seem to make the most of the life people have. Logic and evidence are very important in shaping Humanist attitudes, as well as treating others with respect whatever beliefs they may have. Information on Humanist concepts can be found in the *Living Difference III* syllabus and further information on the [Understanding Humanism website](#).

Further Information

There are many teaching materials available from the Hampshire RE Team and these will help add detail to all of the religions and world views mentioned here, as well as other religions.

For further advice, please contact either Dr Patricia Hannam, County Inspector/Adviser for RE, History and Philosophy (Email: patricia.hannam@hants.gov.uk) or Justine Ball, General Inspector/Adviser for Primary RE (Email: justine.ball@hants.gov.uk).

For further information on planning and teaching packs to supplement your knowledge, please contact Lydia Revett at the County RE Centre (Email: re.centre@hants.gov.uk).

For Hampshire Legal Services please contact:
Email: SchoolLegalSupport@hants.gov.uk.