

How a NATRE-supported parental complaint resulted in improved provision for RE at an Academy

1. Sept 2018: The initial parental complaint

The complaint focused on the academy's failure to comply with its Funding Agreement (FA) with the DfE (Department for Education) regarding provision of RE. A subsidiary complaint was that the material labelled as RE in the Life Skills curriculum was not of sufficient quality to meet Academy duties to maintain academic standards.

3. June 2019: Complaint to the ESFA

The next step in the formal process required the parent to complain to the ESFA (The Education and Skills Funding Agency). ESFA responded by requesting evidence from the Academy that they were meeting FA

The Academy responded to ESFA with a letter explaining how they delivered RE through a Life Skills curriculum and detailed topics covered in every year

5. Sept 2019: OFSTED declares complaint outside its remit

The ESFA response was shared with OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) who responded to say that the quality of RE teaching was not a qualifying category for a complaint to OFSTED.

7. October 2019: Minister for Schools becomes involved

NATRE presented the actual curriculum content from the school to the minister at the Conservative Party Conference.



9. February 2020: School given until May 2020 to revise curriculum

The ESFA informed the parent that they had reviewed the RE provision across the trust and concluded that the RE requirements of the funding agreement were not being met. The DfE therefore requested that the Trust revise their RE provision by the end of May 2020.

Postscript: September 2020.

The parent reviewed the 2020/2021 timetable of his child and found RE had been reinstated as a distinct subject. Discussion with fellow parents confirmed that all pupils were now being taught RE for one lesson a week from years 7-11 and there was also a GCSE option group at Key Stage 4.

2. April - May 2019: School/Governing Body Response to complaint

The school did not uphold the complaint on the grounds that provision was consistent with academy freedoms and the specific trust's policies. The expectations of the trust were that all their academies follow a curriculum that includes RE, delivered through a 'Life Skills' Programme.

4. July 2019: ESFA fails to uphold the complaint

ESFA determined "the academy's Religious Education provision to be compliant with the requirements of their funding agreement" and suggested the parent contact OFSTED regarding their concerns about the quality of the Religious Education provision

6. Sept 2019: Letter to the Secretary of State for Education

The parent wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Education raising questions about the quality of provision for RE in England. The response suggests he use the formal complaints process. Note he had been trying this method since September 2018!

8. November 2019: ESFA reconsiders the complaint

NATRE contacted the ESFA restating the complaint but broadening the scope to the whole Academy Trust. The parent was subsequently informed that they were (re)investigating and were awaiting a response from the Academy Trust regarding its RE provision

10: June 2020: Good news at last!

The parent heard via the local grapevine that a new Head of RE had been appointed and that RE would be on the curriculum as a discrete and distinct subject from September 2020.

The ESFA wrote to the parent to inform them that the Academy had revised their provision in a way that was judged to be compliant with the Academy Funding Agreement and provided the parent with full details including the decision that the Agreed Syllabus would be followed.