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Diana Johnson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

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Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP
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22 July 2009

Sarah McCarthy-Fry

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2009, addressed to Diana Johnson, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, Ms Teresa Deasy, Demotractit Support Officer and Clerk to the Portsmouth SACRE, Portsmouth City Council, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, about the updated non-statutory guidance on Religious Education (RE) which is currently under consultation. I am sorry for the delay in responding to you.

RE has held a special place in the school curriculum since 1944 when the current sharing of responsibilities between Government, local authorities, faith communities and individual schools was established. I believe we have the right balance of responsibility in a local and national partnerships; local authorities are close to and accountable to their communities – they are best placed to design an RE syllabus that reflects the needs and traditions of their community. The national role is to provide guidance and support on quality standards for effective provision.

The updated RE guidance has three main purposes. Firstly it contains an up to date explanation of the law as it applies to the provision of RE in schools, reflecting in particular changes in the types of school since 1994. However there is no change to the law on RE.

Secondly it sets out the Government's views on the importance of RE in the early 21st century, reflecting the multi-ethnic and multi-faith nature of our society, the notions of tolerance and mutual understanding and the Government's emphasis on community cohesion which schools have a new duty to promote. In doing so it reaffirms the Government's commitment to the principles in the non-statutory RE Framework which emphasises the importance of learning about and learning from different religions and beliefs.

Thirdly the guidance is intended to help key stakeholders to carry out their functions effectively: local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs), schools, headteachers and governing bodies. It does this not only by reminding them of these functions but also by suggesting the issues they should consider in exercising them and presenting case studies of effective practice.



department for
children, schools and families

We have not responded to the specific points raised by your constituent as similar issues are being raised by respondents to the public consultation. The consultation period ran for twelve weeks and finished on 24 July. All responses will be considered carefully when finalising the guidance. The consultation can be found at:
http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_22256.aspx.

**APPROVED BY THE MINISTER
AND SIGNED IN HER ABSENCE**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diana Johnson', written in a cursive style.

DIANA JOHNSON MP



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09 July 2009

Dear Teresa

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter I have received from the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

I hope this reply is helpful. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McCarthy-Fry
Member of Parliament for Portsmouth North