

Resolving Participation Barriers in School Curriculum

Bridges not Barriers

Being mindful not to assume participation-barriers exist but, where they do exist, teachers can earn trust and increase pupils' success through understanding their concerns, and considering alternative solution-bridges that fulfil the curriculum.



ART: Some pupils/parents may not feel comfortable with art forms that involve creating/capturing likenesses of humans and animals (including in photography).

Possible solutions may be drawing silhouettes instead of faces, or just part of body (such as eyes or hand), or drawing people in abstract without face details.

DRAMA/SCHOOL PLAYS: Some pupils/parents may not be comfortable with productions including religious concepts/figures (including Christmas productions, and productions including gods or prophets).

Possible solutions may be to ask pupils to derive some universal messages from story (e.g. Nativity story – hardship and hope) and share with audience through devising a play they think more people (e.g. their parents) would be happy attending.

MUSIC: Some pupils/parents may not be comfortable playing instruments.

Possible solutions may be to use the human voice and/or sounds from nature. See also Collective Worship for religious music (hymns/carols).

PHYSICAL EDUCATION, SWIMMING AND DANCE: Some pupils/parents may not be comfortable where parts of their body are visible (e.g. arms and legs).

Possible solutions may be to allow alternative sportswear (e.g. sweatshirts and jogging bottoms, and full length lycra swimsuits); allow pupils to shower in the swimwear and, where practical, offering individual changing rooms. Some pupils/parents may not be comfortable with certain gender mixed environments (e.g. dance) - especially after puberty - and so alternatives could be considered.

RELATIONSHIP AND SEX EDUCATION: Some pupils/parents may voice concern about relationship and sex education content for a number of reasons.

Some concerns and possible solutions are discussed in Bristol SACRE's 'Relationship Education Guidance for Primary Schools'¹. Guidance relating to parental engagement is also available². Also, male pupils may feel more comfortable being taught sex education by a male teacher, and female pupils by a female teacher.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: Some pupils/ parents may not be comfortable with aspects of Religious Education (e.g. visiting places of worship).

Possible solutions may be to explain the purpose of the lesson and remove any misconceptions (e.g. learning about others' beliefs to be more understanding and neighbourly, rather than performing acts of worship).

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP: Some pupils/parents may not be comfortable with participating in collective worship that is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'³, especially praying and hymns/carols. Also, some pupils/parents may not realise this type of Collective Worship occurs in school, even when participating in it (especially younger pupils), and may bare resentment (towards teachers, Christians/Christianity etc) upon realisation and loss of trust.

Possible solutions may be to make clear the wholly/mainly broadly Christian character of collective worship, it is non-denominational and different from corporate worship, and explain that participation is invitational (and parents/sixth form pupils have rights of withdrawal) and not coercive or indoctrinatory. Where broadly Christian collective worship is inappropriate, schools may also consider applying for an exemption through 'determinations'⁴ – allowing, for example, an alternate faith, multi-faith or no-faith collective worship instead.

Resources:

¹<https://bristolsacre.org.uk/site/ensuring-religious-diversity-and-inclusion>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engaging-parents-with-relationships-education-policy>

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/40/section/7/enacted>

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf