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Monday 8th February

Dear Secretary of State,

We write from the CCFE representing a broad coalition of groups engaged in education, established in 2016.

The commencement date for RSE/RSHE to be implemented fully in the curriculum was originally scheduled for September 2020. You permitted, very wisely and prudently if we may say, its full implementation in schools to be delayed until the summer term of this year 2021 given the difficulties many schools faced with compliance, *especially with the mandatory parental consultation* because of the extraordinary circumstances of the first national lockdown of schools from March 2020.

We now face a further national lockdown with at present an unspecified end and the need for all schools to implement changed procedures for exams, and institute complex programmes for testing of staff and pupils.

Many of our members and contacts work in, lead or govern schools, and have direct experience of what all this means in terms of pressures on staff, resources and the curriculum.

We would request that the wise policy of postponement of RSE be extended until the start of the next academic year September 2021, for the reasons listed below. To require implementation by the summer term would place parents, pupils and schools under unconscionable strain and potentially cause the implementation of RSE to fail and so undermine any long term purpose in its programme.

1. Parents: Many schools have of course commenced, if not completed, the mandatory consultation process with parents, but this new national lockdown cannot but impede all plans made to complete this by the summer term in a satisfactory manner. Postponing the statutory commencement will allow this mandatory consultation with parents to be properly and effectively concluded.

It is common knowledge certain aspects of RSE are very controversial, and have given rise to school protests, lawsuits and a huge rise in home-schooling in certain areas and communities. If schools are to have any chance of truly “taking their parents with them” in this, there cannot be any shadow of doubt the mandatory process has been completed properly. The danger of legal protests against non-fulfilment of this part of the law would cause schools and parents difficulties for the future. Schools could not endure further protests in this regard, reeling as they are from all their current pressures.

2. Pupils: Their schooling has now been enormously disrupted for a second time in 12 months. Older students face all the complexities of the new arrangements for their exams. RSE is an entirely new area of the curriculum. To ask them to fully absorb it in the final term of the year when so many other pressures are more critical will actually lead many pupils to view with an understandable derision a whole new part of the curriculum that does nothing to alleviate the real and current demands and strains of lockdown. It will become associated with the lockdown and be considered bizarre in its introduction in this summer term. If it is wished to make this a proper, respected and understood part of the curriculum, to introduce it and enforce it in this academic year will only have one outcome in the minds of already destabilised school pupils - contemptuous dismissal as irrelevant to their real lives.

Also for those in Y6 to receive a term of instruction which then they will immediately forgo in their transition to senior school again would appear senseless to them. The same goes for Y11 students with far more pressing matters of their future on their minds. We would strongly urge its commencement properly and coherently in September 2021 or face its rejection by pupils.

3. Schools: To properly implement RSE/RSHE, timetables must be written, teachers trained, resources obtained or/and developed. If schools have already done this, they may be prepared. What they were not prepared for was a second national lockdown that has thrown all into disarray. As you have generously acknowledged in your letters to Heads and Schools, the response of the teaching profession has been little short of miraculous at times, given what they face in trying to ensure continuity of education for their pupils both in school and working remotely. But one can easily surmise the reaction from staffrooms and Heads' offices if these new aspects of the curriculum are enforced in the final term of this exacting year. With the summer to plan properly, schools have a chance to effect a well-considered, consulted upon and resourced start to RSE in September. This gives it a chance to succeed, at the cost only of a short delay. Its forced arrival in the summer term will exhaust and dismay many throughout the teaching profession and lead it to being dismissed at a time when the welfare, well-being, mental health and managing exam pressures on students are more pressing.

4. Recent New Guidance: There is also a final point. In September 24th last year your department issued most helpful guidance on the care that must be taken in using resources in school that are not "partisan" or "political". Many parents and schools were grateful for this. Schools are currently subject to a blizzard of promotions from various campaign bodies to adopt - often with the recommendation they are 'approved by your Department' - various resources and schemes. Some may be good. Some may be bad. But schools need time to assess and consult with parents fully, given the guidance provided in this academic year.

For all these reasons we urge you to consider a further extension to this new part of the curriculum to the commencement of the next academic year; this will allow time for parents, pupils and staff to prepare for it accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Nazir-Ali". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the end of the name.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, Chair, on behalf of the constituent bodies of the Christian Coalition For Education

List of Organisations and Persons Associated

Barbara Bell – Board Member, Association of Christian Teachers

Alastair Reid - General Secretary, The Independent Schools Christian Alliance

The Revd Andrew Towner – Chair of Carlisle Diocesan Board of Education

Nick Seward – Headmaster of Kingham Hill School

Alun Ebenezer – Executive Headmaster, The Fulham Boys School

Edmund Matyjaszek – Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham

Nigel Steele - Christian Education Europe

Steve Beegoo – Head of Education, Christian Concern

Guy Hordern – School Governor

Dr Philip Barnes – Emeritus Reader in Religious and Theological Education, King's College London

Dr Marius Felderhof - Hon. Sr. Research Fellow, University of Birmingham

Peter Mitchell – Education Consultant

The Venerable Norman Russell - former Archdeacon of Berkshire, Prolocutor of the Lower House of the Convocation of Canterbury and Chair of the House of Clergy in General Synod.

Edmund Adamus – Education Consultant

(Organisations are listed for identification purposes only)