

Background Paper for Revising the Agreed Syllabus February 2021

This is a background paper to update school and academy leaders and teachers on SACRE and the work they are now undertaking with schools to review the current RE Local Agreed syllabus for East Sussex.

The legal requirements:

- SACRE must review its RE Agreed Syllabus every five years
- An Agreed Syllabus Conference is to be set up to conduct the review

An agreed syllabus must *'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'*

Education Act (1996 Section 375 (3))/School Standards and Framework Act (1998, Schedule 19, para.5).

Introduction:

One of the most important functions of SACRE is to produce the Local Agreed Syllabus. This needs to relate to the developments in education and the educational change agenda, such as, the new Ofsted inspection framework 2019, British values, National Commission for RE report 2018, RE and world views, RSE (Relationship and Sex Education) statutory requirements etc. It needs to be relevant and engaging for all pupils and promote greater participation, supporting high quality teaching and learning.

The current East Sussex Agreed Syllabus 'Continuing the Journey' was published for implementation from September 2017. This was an update on the previous Agreed Syllabus 'A Journey of Discovery' and was not a substantial re-write at the time. The process for reviewing the Agreed Syllabus is to set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference to undertake the work and agree the new Agreed Syllabus for East Sussex. The timeline requires that the new Agreed Syllabus be in place ready for implementation from September 2022.

The purpose of this paper is to set the context and begin the process of consulting with schools and school leaders to ensure that everyone's views are taken into consideration when developing the new Agreed Syllabus.

We are committed to ensuring that the quality of RE teaching improves across the county and that we have the right tools and expertise to support schools in their endeavours. We have an opportunity at this time to invest in the process with schools so that we have an up to date, inclusive and accessible Agreed Syllabus that supports children and young people to know and understand belief, faith, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the 21st Century.

Timeline:

The timeline for reviewing the Agreed Syllabus would be to be able to publish a new syllabus in January 2022 ready for implementation from September 2022. This means that the work needed to undertake the review and work with schools to arrive at the new syllabus needs to be happening over the summer terms in 2021 so

that it can be approved by the Agreed Syllabus Conference, which is the formal adoption process, in December 2021 ready for a January 2022 launch.

Feedback on current Agreed Syllabus:

In the autumn term the RE network meetings for primary and secondary teachers took place in October feedback was requested in broad terms on the current syllabus, what works and what could be improved.

Broadly speaking RE leaders and teachers said:

- It is unclear to follow for new and inexperienced teachers
- Lacked 'meatiness' and structure
- Not easy to link in to Understanding Christianity that our Diocesan schools use
- The glossary of terms is useful
- One person liked the assessment element, others commented that assessment guidance needed improving
- The current Agreed Syllabus limits schools in terms of what they can do and what they can teach and is not interesting enough to engage children and young people.
- One of the strengths for primary was having a bank of resources to use and adapt as part of the curriculum, particularly around world religions
- Agreed syllabus feels too content based and not looking at the skill development and spiritual awareness
- Feedback from the secondary RE Hub:
- Some secondary schools are following the current syllabus whilst others are not. A number of schools are academies so are not required to follow the locally agreed syllabi.
- Request for humanism to be included at KS3
- An option for the six major world religions to be taught at KS3
- The current syllabus is outdated and not an easily useable document

This is only an indication of the feedback on the current Agreed Syllabus. Below are the options for consideration. This is an opportunity to think deeply about what we need and for leaders and teachers to have their input and be able to shape the future.

There will be opportunities for you to join an online focus group to hear more about the options and have your say on how this is taken forward and fed back to SACRE in June 2021 to inform the decision-making process. Look out for the links to the focus groups on the 28 April and the 13 May 2021.

Options for consideration:

Option 1:

- *Tweak the current Agreed Syllabus but basically keep it very much as it is from within our own resources.*

Comments: Early indications are that the current ES Agreed Syllabus is in need of significant updating. We know a number of academies choose not to use it and primary schools often find it cumbersome to work with. As it was already an

updated version of the 2012 Agreed Syllabus it is probably time to do a more comprehensive update.

Option 2:

- *Review and rewrite the syllabus in detail in East Sussex from within our own resources or with the support of an external organisation or additional capacity.*

Comments: To do this would be a huge undertaking and would require significant resource both financial and in terms of time and expertise. The principle of a more major rewrite is probably right but this may be achieved through other means.

Option 3:

- *Commission an external provider, for example, RE Today the national charitable organisation that supports the teaching of RE and works with SACREs nationally to work with us and adopt one of their already developed syllabi. Possibly Adopt the RE Today Syllabus or A or the RE Today Syllabus B.*

Comments: RE Today is working with around 30+ SACREs nationally and most of them have engaged with the syllabi that RE Today provides.

- The Model B syllabus is up to date and provides an approach based on individual religions, usually studying two world religions per year with a thematic question to explore in more depth in the third term. It links to Understanding Christianity which most Diocesan schools use and has the scope to include non-religious world views.
- The teaching and learning approach in this model falls under three strands, making sense of beliefs, understanding the impact and making connections.
- RE Today are also a strong CPD provider and offer a range of training events to support the implementation of any new syllabus. Lat Blaycock from RE Today has already run events to support RE Teaching this academic year which has been very well received by schools.
- Detailed units of work for primary and secondary schools are available, at an additional cost, to support the implementation of the syllabus along with clear assessment guidance. Normally a 5year license is bought on a per school basis. Additional ongoing support is available from RE Today including CPD and resources and reduced cost membership to NATRE for schools.
- As RE Today works with so many LAs across the country there would be opportunities to join up with and share ideas with other areas.
- The syllabus Model B runs across KS1, KS2 and KS3. They would also support ES in writing a core curriculum to support KS4 RE teaching if we so wished.

Option 4:

- *Work with a local SE consortium of SACREs led by Hampshire to adopt the 'Living Different' syllabus that they are in the process of revising currently for implementation from September 2021. (The consortium is made up of SACREs from Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Southampton, Chelsea and Kensington, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Westminster.)*

Comments: The syllabus has a practical approach to teaching RE and is based on academic research involving key leaders in the world of religious education.

- It takes an enquiry-based approach and looks not only at the knowledge but how to develop skills and promote the engagement in the curriculum. This supports particularly the non-specialist teachers of RE so that they have both the content to be taught and how best to deliver it.
- They offer further support and training for both primary and secondary teachers, much of that is online currently and would need to know if this would continue to make is accessible for East Sussex should we chose to work with them.
- An ongoing licensing cost and charges for training and additional resources would apply in the same way as working with RE Today.
- The syllabus looks at expectations at the end of KSs and a strand that runs through is the question about why that belief or concept is important and this tracks through to the KS4 exam requirements, thereby giving a coherence to the total syllabus across all KSs. There is also a core curriculum syllabus for KS4 if not all pupils follow an accredited qualification in KS4.

The Schools Working Group for RE:

The Schools Working Group for RE has agreed to lead this consultation process with schools and will be running the online open sessions to discuss things in further detail. The members of the Schools Working Group for RE are:

Barry Blakelock – Principal Rye Academy and Chair

Helen Key – Principal Chailey School

Claire Ramalli – Teacher of Ethics and RE at Ratton School

Tim Telford – teacher of RE at Beacon CC

Claire Rivers – Teaching School Director St Marks Teaching School

Laura Cooper – Headteacher St John's Crowborough

Carrie Beech – Education Consultant