

**Report to:** People Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting:** 11 March 2024

**By:** The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE

**Title:** Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report

**Purpose:** To update Members on the role and work of the East Sussex SACRE

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to comment on and note:

**The work of SACRE in the implementation of the Local Agreed Syllabus, raising the profile and importance of religious education and supporting the high-quality teaching of Religious Education in East Sussex and academies.**

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This annual report is prepared by East Sussex's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). It provides a picture of the support given for Religious Education and Collective Worship during 2022-23. SACRE also provides advice to the Local Authority on matters relating to Religious Education and Collective Worship. This report is a public document sent to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Department for Education (DFE).
- 1.2 This academic year has been about strengthening what we do: not only have we focused on supporting those responsible for delivery of the new Agreed Syllabus, but we have also made time and space to listen to the voices of those involved in Religious Education across the county. Our primary and secondary subject networks are established and remain an important part of the offer to schools alongside a wealth of resources to make teaching a rich and rewarding experience. As a result, we too are learning more about what is happening in schools and the impact of this vital subject.
- 1.3 Meetings are well-attended by members who are steadfast in their commitment to the development of high-quality Religious Education for all. Council members are knowledgeable about the area they serve as well as the latest issues in the field. Typically, discussions have focused on effective implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus, the importance of Collective Worship and rigorous self-evaluation of our own work. We have taken the time to reflect on our own policies and practices to make sure they are up-to-date and fit for purpose. This has meant meetings are purposeful and the quality of debate satisfying.

## **2 Statutory responsibilities – The Local Agreed Syllabus**

- 2.1 The East Sussex Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, 'Faith and Belief in the 21st Century', is the statutory curriculum for all maintained schools in the county and was first taught from September 2022. It was developed with external advice from RE Today in consultation with school and subject leaders, children, young people, and their families. The

curriculum also covers a second resource, 'Understanding Christianity', which is already taught by most of our diocesan schools. This has ensured the syllabus has broad appeal.

- 2.2 The Agreed Syllabus is under licence for five years for all schools in East Sussex. Costs have been met by SACRE and include a programme of professional development for teachers. We are pleased to see the syllabus has also been adopted by several single-academies and smaller multi-academy trusts in the county.
- 2.3 'Faith and Belief in the 21st Century' is up to date and relevant. It focuses on the world's major religions whilst allowing for wider world views and the exploration of thematic, moral, and ethical questions. Teaching, learning and assessment centres on three strands: making sense of beliefs; understanding the impact; and making connections. New schemes of work cover Key Stages 1 to 3 whilst a core programme of study for Key Stage 4 has been developed by Claire Ramalli, our Specialist RE Advisor, and several local teachers with support from RE Today.
- 2.4 This is the first year of a three-year training programme delivered by RE Today through our Subject Networks. These meetings have maintained their popularity and become an essential part of our offer for specialist or non-specialist teachers alike. Claire Rivers, our Primary Lead, and Sam Keddie, our Secondary Lead, bring considerable expertise to the networks, making them hugely worthwhile. Furthermore, Executive Principal, Kirsty Eydmann shares her experience of adapting the syllabus to meet the needs of her pupils with other professionals working in similar settings. Combined, these meetings provide a high level of support to our colleagues working in schools and allow for ongoing feedback into the continued development of the syllabus and our training offer.
- 2.5 Over the course of the year, Subject Network Meetings have benefited from sessions being led by national experts such as Dr Kate Christopher exploring Islam and Worldviews; Stephen Pett discussing the teaching of Hinduism; and Katie Harrison sharing the benefit of her experience on delivery of Collective Worship. In addition to these regular twilight meetings, an annual conference is held for each phase. This year, the primary conference was held online and led by Lat Blaylock whilst the secondary conference was face-to-face, hosted by Chailey School with 14 schools and SACRE represented.
- 2.6 In a recent survey of teachers attending Primary Subject Network Meetings, all respondents indicated they had engaged with and implemented the new Agreed Syllabus. 92% of respondents were positive about the ease at which the new Agreed Syllabus had been incorporated into their school's long-term planning. 88% of respondents were positive about how they had found implementation of scheme's activities and assessments. They said that pupils had found the materials more challenging yet more engaging than those previously used. Whilst teachers appreciated the quality of the complementary resource 'Understanding Christianity' some also reported that it added an additional layer of complexity.
- 2.7 The picture was similar at secondary with the vast majority of respondents being positive about the syllabus. Whilst teachers valued the materials and support on offer it has been more challenging to engage secondary schools and teachers despite a similar offer that comprises twilight sessions, an annual conference and bespoke support. Whilst secondary respondents enjoy online delivery, they also value face-to-face engagement.
- 2.8 The academic year has seen development of protocols for 'Good Practice Visits' which enable Members to see for themselves the excellent work that goes on in schools and to talk first-hand to those responsible for delivery of the Agreed Syllabus. Good Practice Visits are intended to support universal adoption of the Agreed Syllabus in all maintained schools and more widely; identify expertise and facilitate school-to-school support through the Subject Network Meetings; and recognise and celebrate good practice in delivery of the new Agreed Syllabus.

- 2.9 By making visits, Members can see practice across the county, positively re-enforce the work undertaken by schools and be reassured by network leaders of the support being offered. Moreover, visits allow Members to further build their own knowledge and skills as well as deepen their understanding of the quality of religious education. So far this year, visits have been made to Willingdon Primary School and Ratton School - secondary academy in Eastbourne. Upcoming visits include Blackboys Church of England Primary School and Grovelands Community Primary School, Hailsham. Even from the limited number of visits so far, it is clear schools are engaging with the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and are committed to the developing of a thoughtfully designed curriculum.
- 2.10 Helpfully, the local authority has provided SACRE with entry and attainment data. Members understand outcomes have been unevenly impacted by the pandemic. Having said that, comparing entries for 2018, 2019 and 2022, it is evident that take-up of GCSE Religious Studies (Full Course) has fallen below national average. Conversely, attainment compares favourably being above national average for 9–4 and 9–5. Going forward, East Sussex SACRE will promote an increase in entries to the subject whilst aiming to maintain outcomes above the national average.

### **3 Statutory responsibilities – Collective Worship**

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of SACRE to monitor schools' statutory responsibility to hold Collective Worship. Whilst there are many schools across the county that offer impactful Collective Worship, there is also some variation in the system. Therefore, this aspect of our work remains a priority and an area we are keen to better understand through our good practice visits. To further support this, in June 2023, Katie Harrison from the Oak National Academy ran a session through the Primary Subject Network on inclusive, invitational, and inspiring practice.
- 3.2 Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship. Guidance on good practice and protocols for withdrawal are made available to schools; the Specialist RE Advisor can also offer further support if needed. SACRE recognises parents' legal right to withdraw but would like to see all children and young people have access to rich and stimulating Collective Worship.
- 3.3 No complaints were made to SACRE during the year about Collective Worship.
- 3.4 There were no requests for a determination to vary statutory requirements. SACRE's Determinations Policy was updated in line with NASACRE guidance and approved in March 2023. The next date for review is March 2025.

### **4 Links with other organisations**

- 4.1 East Sussex SACRE continues to stay connected with national events and views. Our Chairperson, Roy Galley, is a former member of the NASACRE Executive and continues to play an active role in their discussions. He also maintains helpful links with other national organisations such as the Religious Education Council (REC). Work on the new Agreed Syllabus also renewed our co-operation with the Diocese and Archdiocese.
- 4.2 SACRE Members keep up to date through NASACRE termly briefings and regular attendance to online training. The Chairperson also reports on national, regional, and local issues. Training accessed this year by Members included: 'Applying for and gaining a Westhill/NASACRE Award'; 'SACREs – A way forward?'; 'How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE'; 'What's happening to Collective Worship beyond determinations?'; and the enduring 'So, you've joined your local SACRE...'
- 4.3 Our Specialist RE Adviser continues to attend Southeast Central Regional SACRE meetings, engages with good practice from around the region and reports back to the Standing Advisory Council. She is also an executive member of AREIAC and keeps up to date with national reports and research linked to Religion and Worldviews. Through the RE Hub for the

Southeast area, she has begun to participate in their work and become more aware of the events they promote.

- 4.4 SACRE continues to work closely with RE Today on implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. We also draw on resources from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) – the subject’s professional association, dedicated to supporting and empowering professionals in the field of Religious Education.

## **5 Other areas of work**

- 5.1 East Sussex SACRE promoted several opportunities across the county including the ‘Jewish Living Exhibition’ which ran in Brighton for several weeks as well as a visit to the Synagogue in Hove which was taken up by several teachers.
- 5.2 Given our focus on the development of the new Agreed Syllabus, there was no additional training offered to governors this year however we will be restarting this programme with a session on Collective Worship next year.
- 5.3 Our Chairperson engaged with schools through the ‘Virtual Schoolbag’ (VSB), writing to thank them for their work on making the new Agreed Syllabus such a success and later in the year congratulating them on their GCSE outcomes for Religious Studies.

## **6 SACRE arrangements**

- 6.1 There were three meetings of SACRE during 2023, held in a hybrid format, allowing in-person or online attendance which enabled all our meetings to be quorate. Meetings were held:
- 17 November 2022 Attendance: 55%
  - 2 March 2023 Attendance: 70%
  - 15 June 2023 Attendance: 87%
- 6.2 The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was also held on 2 March 2023. Roy Galley was reappointed Chairperson and Peter White appointed Vice Chairperson. All meetings are open to the public and minutes are available online. Two Members stepped down over the course of the year.
- 6.3 Representatives of the Diocese of Chichester and the Archdiocese of Arundel regularly attend meetings. We continue to have fair representation across faiths and from those of no faith. Representatives include Church of England, Muslim, long-serving Unitarian, Bahai and Jewish Members. Although we are very aware of the importance of expanding our membership to reflect the diversity of faith and belief in the county, recruiting new members remains a considerable challenge. In a similar way, the membership reflects the wide range of schools in the county and includes primary, secondary, diocesan, maintained, academies, and special schools.
- 6.4 An undoubted highlight of each meeting is the opportunity for members to share their belief through a standing item called ‘My World, My Faith’. This allows Members to develop a deeper and more personal understanding of faith and belief in the communities they serve. Visiting speakers have included Oliver Stevens, Lead Elder from the King’s Church in Eastbourne, who gave an overview of his work and offered to facilitate school visits to the Church. Feedback from the Primary and Secondary Subject Network Meetings as well as Special Schools has also taken on increased importance.
- 6.5 This was the final year of our three-year development plan. Over the lifespan of the plan considerable progress has been made in supporting the quality of RE teaching and learning in all schools alongside a review of the Agreed Syllabus. SACRE has also taken significant steps to improve the effectiveness of our own work through rigorous self-evaluation and robust review of policies, procedures, and protocols.

- 6.6 The next iteration of the development plan is tightly aligned to our self-evaluation and whilst we have actions in each of the five sections, SACRE has identified the 'standards and quality of provision of Religious Education', 'Collective Worship' and 'contribution to promoting cohesion across the community' as main priorities going into the next cycle.
- 6.7 Underpinning this growth will be more good practice visits to schools, continuing support for the Subject Network Meetings and development of SACRE's page on the Local Authority's website through which we aim to provide authoritative and trustworthy resources to schools. Moreover, we will utilise the expertise at our disposal to broaden our training offer and improve the support we provide for the delivery of Collective Worship. Finally, we will continue to encourage visits to SACRE from a diverse range of faith groups from across the county, so they better understand our work and any potential role for them.
- 6.8 Each meeting has a budget update and closes with consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. New role descriptors and a five-year forward plan were considered and adopted in June 2023. All other documents are on a two-year review cycle to ensure they support Members as they discharge their statutory duties.
- 6.9 SACRE continued to receive a budget of £15,000. This has enabled us to maximise our role by securing advice from our Specialist RE Advisor. It has also paid the licence fees for the new Agreed Syllabus and the accompanying support package from RE Today. Furthermore, our funding supports the continued growth of the Subject Network Meetings as well as engagement with NASACRE including attendance to their annual conference. SACRE is supported by Children's Services through provision of a Representative and an experienced Clerk.
- 6.10 Although funding for the next two years has been reduced to £10,000, because the license fees for the new Agreed Syllabus have now been paid, it allows us to maintain all our current activities. This amount is an increase to the budget typically received prior to SACRE's review of the Agreed Syllabus. Having said that, to realise our ambition for an annual student conference, we will seek to gain additional funding from external sources such as professional organisations and charities.

## **7 Advice to the Local Authority**

- 7.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an Annual Report and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council. The following advice is given by SACRE to the Local Authority:
- Support SACRE in understanding how the local authority promotes community cohesion and how we can diversify representation of Members to better reflect the wide range of faith and belief across the county.
  - Help strengthen the evaluation of standards and quality of provision for Religious Education in schools by working in partnership with SACRE, providing data when appropriate, and harnessing the potential of the school-led system.

**Councillor Roy Galley**  
**Chair of SACRE**