

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 12 March 2025

By: The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE

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

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

RECOMMENDATION:

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

SACRE's statutory role in advising the local authority on Religious Education and collective worship, overseeing the Local Agreed Syllabus, monitoring standards, and fulfilling its legal duties in relation to determinations and annual reporting.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annual report is prepared by East Sussex's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). It provides an overview of the support offered for Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship during the academic year 2024–25. SACRE also advises the Local Authority on matters relating to RE and Collective Worship. This report is a public document and is shared with the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Department for Education (DfE).
- 1.2 During this academic year, SACRE has fulfilled all its statutory responsibilities. Our work has focused on embedding the Agreed Syllabus; developing subject expertise in religious education; providing guidance and training on Collective Worship; and strengthening understanding of community cohesion. As schools have grown in confidence with curriculum development and delivery, members have increasingly undertaken school visits to observe the impact of this work directly. These visits also enable members to hear the views of pupils, teachers, and school leaders, offering valuable insight into how the curriculum is developing across the county.
- 1.3 SACRE meetings remain well attended, with members demonstrating strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils receive high-quality religious education. Councillors bring valuable local knowledge and contribute to the Local Authority's wider work on community cohesion. Discussions have focused on strengthening support for teachers, providing clear and reliable guidance for leaders and governors, and evaluating the effectiveness of SACRE's work. A five-year forward plan underpins this work and supports the effective operation of the committee.
- 1.4 Primary and secondary subject networks continue to be central to SACRE's support for schools and are strengthened by the high-quality resources associated with the Agreed

Syllabus provided through RE Today. These networks promote collaboration and professional dialogue, enabling schools to share effective practice. As a result, the syllabus supports both pupils' understanding of religion and worldviews and teachers' confidence and subject knowledge.

- 1.5 Alongside regular review of the Agreed Syllabus and continued work on inclusive Collective Worship, SACRE has reviewed its policies and procedures to ensure they remain current, robust, and effective. This enables members to engage meaningfully with visiting speakers at meetings, broadening understanding of different beliefs and worldviews and how these are reflected in educational practice.

2. Statutory Responsibilities – 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 has been in place since September 2022. Its development involved consultation with external experts from RE Today, alongside contributions from school leaders, teachers, pupils, and families. The syllabus incorporates *Understanding Christianity*, previously used by Church of England schools, ensuring continuity and coherence across different school contexts.
- 2.2 The Agreed Syllabus is licensed for five years and made available to all schools in East Sussex, with SACRE meeting the associated costs. This includes a comprehensive professional development programme. It is encouraging that an increasing number of single academies and smaller multi-academy trusts are choosing to adopt the syllabus.
- 2.3 The syllabus is current, inclusive, and academically rigorous. It covers major world religions, non-religious worldviews, and thematic ethical questions, structured around three core strands: understanding beliefs, recognising impact, and making connections. Additional lesson plans support Key Stages 1 to 3, with a core study programme for Key Stage 4 developed by the Specialist RE Advisor, Claire Ramalli, and local teachers in partnership with RE Today.
- 2.4 For the third consecutive year, professional development has been delivered through primary and secondary subject networks, facilitated by RE Today specialists. These networks continue to support both specialist and non-specialist teachers. While the primary network benefits from consistently high engagement, participation in the secondary network remains more variable.
- 2.5 Primary Lead, Claire Rivers, and Secondary Lead, Sam Keddie, bring substantial curriculum development and leadership experience of their own, ensuring participants find the content of sessions relevant and the opportunity to come together valuable. Subject Network Meetings have been led by professionals such as Julia Childs exploring 'Oracy and Worldviews' covering techniques such as 'triple coding'; Glenn Skelhorn discussing 'Philosophy for teens'; and Katie Harrison sharing the benefit of her experience on delivery of Collective Worship.
- 2.6 Three twilight sessions are offered annually alongside a phase conference. The primary conference was attended online by around fifty teachers and led by Julie Childs, National RE Advisor, focusing on inspection, subject leadership, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and RE as well as creative approaches to teaching Judaism. The

secondary conference, hosted by Chailey School, was attended by eight teachers and led by Ian Nicholson and Angela Hill, addressing SEND, diversity, leadership, and assessment.

- 2.7 This year, Karen Sitwell-Cook became the SACRE representative for special schools and specialist provision. Discussion focused on embedding RE within specialist curricula through assemblies, school councils, and reward systems. Flexible and creative approaches were identified as key to enabling pupils with SEND to access their entitlement, particularly through festivals, celebrations, and exploration of diverse worldviews.
- 2.8 Survey feedback from the primary phase indicated that teachers feel well supported in implementing the Agreed Syllabus and highly satisfied with the professional development offered. Respondents noted that the syllabus is relevant to pupils' lived experiences and supports confident discussion of religion and worldviews. Teachers highlighted the benefits of the spiral curriculum model in securing understanding over time, while also identifying that some theological concepts remain challenging and require careful adaptation.
- 2.9 Two priorities for further development have been identified: improving accessibility for all learners and strengthening assessment practice. These areas will be explored further in the coming year. Specialist Leader in Education Lois Burton offered to support schools in developing *Understanding Christianity*, alongside bespoke support from the Specialist RE Advisor.
- 2.10 Secondary schools reported similarly positive views of the syllabus. Uptake among academies continues to grow, although engagement with the secondary network remains limited to a core group of schools. Sessions are delivered both online and in person, supported by a growing digital resource bank hosted on Padlet.
- 2.11 SACRE also reviewed the Oak National Academy Religious Education resources during the year. These materials were recognised as a useful supplementary tool, particularly for non-specialist teachers and for supporting SEND pupils, but not as a replacement for the locally agreed syllabus.
- 2.12 Throughout the year, SACRE members undertook several Good Practice Visits to celebrate effective curriculum delivery, promote adoption of the Agreed Syllabus, and identify expertise to share through the subject networks. School visits included St Peter and St Paul's Primary School, Ninfield Church of England Primary School, Christ Church Church of England Primary and Nursery Academy, and The Haven Church of England Methodist Primary School, all of which had recent positive SIAMS outcomes.
- 2.13 In July, members visited All Saints and St Richard's Church of England Primary School, a small voluntary-aided school. They observed an assembly, Collective Worship, and an RE lesson on Judaism, noting that spirituality is embedded across the curriculum and that Year 6 pupils take on leadership roles in worship, contributing to an inclusive and positive ethos. Opportunities shared by Members to draw on external speakers from different faiths, beliefs and worldviews were seen as helpful. As a result, SACRE will continue to promote the RE Hub and speaker provision to schools.
- 2.14 Good Practice Visits typically include meetings with senior leaders, lesson observations, attendance at Collective Worship, pupil voice activities, and discussion with subject leaders.

Members consistently report high levels of teacher engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment to inclusive curriculum development.

- 2.15 The Local Authority provides SACRE with annual entry and attainment data. Take up of the full course GCSE in summer 2024 remained static at 22.3% of the cohort, below the national figure of 33.5%. Attainment also remained broadly stable. Several schools—Beacon Academy, Chailey School, Priory School, St Catherine’s College, St Richard’s Catholic College, and Uckfield College—achieved results significantly above the national average. Our goal is to reach national attainment standards, and we continue to view the full course qualification as the best option for fulfilling statutory requirements at Key Stage 4.

3. Statutory Responsibilities – Collective Worship

- 3.1 SACRE oversees schools’ statutory responsibilities for Collective Worship. While many schools provide high quality opportunities, SACRE has focused on addressing inconsistency by strengthening understanding among those responsible for delivery and providing clear guidance and training.
- 3.2 In June 2025, SACRE published updated guidance outlining legal requirements for Collective Worship, clarifying its educational purpose, inclusive nature, and distinction from assembly and religious education. The guidance addresses festival marking, visitor involvement, music, special school contexts, and the process for applying for a Determination where necessary. It also provides practical considerations for music, special schools, visitor contributions, and the process for seeking a Determination if a school cannot meet the legal requirements. SACRE members have made Collective Worship a feature of their Good Practice Visits.
- 3.3 Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship. Guidance regarding best practices and procedures for withdrawal is available to schools on our regularly updated website: [Czone – SACRE](#). Further assistance is also available from the Specialist RE Advisor as needed. While SACRE acknowledges the legal right of parents to withdraw, it encourages all children and young people to participate in enriching and engaging Collective Worship opportunities.
- 3.4 No complaints were made to SACRE during the year about Collective Worship.
- 3.5 No applications were submitted for a determination to vary statutory requirements. SACRE’s Determinations Policy was revised in accordance with NASACRE guidance and received approval in June 2025. The subsequent review is scheduled for June 2027.

4. Links with other organisations

- 4.1 East Sussex SACRE maintains engagement with national events and initiatives. Members remain informed via NASACRE termly briefings and participate consistently in online training sessions. Both the Chairman and Specialist RE Advisor deliver regular reports addressing local, regional, and national matters.
- 4.2 Training accessed this year by Members includes: ‘Calling all members of SACRE Group D - How to be an effective member of your SACRE’; ‘Being an effective SACRE Clerk’; ‘Working on an Agreed Syllabus Conference – supports and processes’; ‘How can SACREs make

strategic use of the New Oak National Curriculum?'; and 'Supporting your SACRE as a Professional Advisor'. Members also regularly join 'In Conversation with NASACRE' sessions.

- 4.3 Our Specialist RE Adviser engages actively in regional and national professional networks to ensure our work remains current and well informed. She participates in NASACRE Southeast 'In Conversation' meetings, reviews effective practice from across the region, and disseminates relevant updates to members. As an executive member of the Association for Religious Education Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC), she remains closely engaged with emerging research in Religion and Worldviews. She also promotes the work of RE Hubs to support the delivery of high quality Religion and Worldviews provision. In addition, she supports two other SACREs, sits on the NASACRE Executive, and contributes to curriculum development for Oak National Academy, further strengthening the strategic expertise that informs our work.
- 4.4 SACRE maintains a strong partnership with RE Today to support the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. We also utilise resources provided by the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), the professional association committed to supporting and advancing practitioners within the field of Religious Education.

5. Other areas of SACRE involvement

- 5.1 SACRE continues to deliver a Westhill Endowment funded project promoting diversity and understanding through visits to places of worship. A 12 month extension has been agreed, with filming taking place at a synagogue, mosque, and a Humanist naming ceremony. The resulting film will support teaching of the Agreed Syllabus.
- 5.2 In response to international events, members remained alert to the potential for antisemitism in schools. Resources shared with SACRE included Jewish Living Online (JLO), a KS3 resource designed to support RE, History, and Citizenship teaching through accessible content, contemporary Jewish voices, and ready-made assessment materials.
- 5.3 SACRE also shared information about Generation 2 Generation, a Holocaust education charity offering free school visits and digital sessions led by second and third generation survivors, supporting understanding through lived experience and personal testimony.
- 5.4 As a follow up to last year's Pupil Conference, we plan to organise another event for schools in June 2026 sponsored by a local multi-academy trust.

6. SACRE Arrangements

- 6.1 There were three SACRE meetings during 2024/25. All were held in a hybrid format that allow in person or online attendance making sure they were quorate.

Meetings were held:

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| • 19 November 2024 | Attendance: 60% |
| • 25 February 2025 | Attendance: 70% |
| • 3 June 2025 | Attendance: 71% |

- 6.2 The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was also held on 25 February 2025. Cllr Colin Belsey was reappointed Chairman and Peter White reappointed Vice Chairman. All meetings are open to the public and minutes available online.
- 6.3 We ensure balanced representation of different faiths and belief systems, bringing together participants from the Church of England (including the Diocesan Board of Education), as well as members of the Southeastern Baptist Association, Unitarian Church, Bahá'í, Jewish, and Humanist communities.
- 6.4 East Sussex SACRE has five of the fifteen representatives from 'Other Christian denominations and other Religions' (Group A); two of the four representatives from 'The Church of England' (Group B); six of the six representatives from 'Teacher Associations' (Group C); and five of the five representatives from 'The Local Authority' (Group D - appointed in conformity with the political balance).
- 6.5 At the end of the academic year, Jon Gilbert, School Effectiveness Officer for the Diocese of Chichester, stepped down from his role after many years of service. In May 2025, SACRE welcomed Cllr Anne Cross as the fifth representative of the Local Authority. We welcomed a new clerk, Rebecca Harmer, and agreed to review how Group C – Representatives of Teacher Associations were allocated. Although we are committed to broadening our membership to better represent the county's diverse faiths and beliefs, attracting new members remains a significant challenge.
- 6.6 We are in the second year of our three year development plan, which aligns with our self-evaluation's five sections. SACRE's main priorities are Religious Education standards, Collective Worship, and promoting community cohesion. We continue to enhance our work through thorough self evaluation and policy review.
- 6.7 SACRE has determined a five year forward plan to ensure effective running of the committee into the future. This enables Members to focus on understanding the quality of support being offered, developing trustworthy advice and guidance for schools and increasing the amount of direct work they undertake such as Good Practice Visits and provision of an annual pupil conference.
- 6.8 Through SACRE's page on the Local Authority's website, we aim to provide authoritative and trustworthy resources for schools. This year we have published two pieces of guidance: "Including pupils of faith in school life" and "Collective Worship – Advice to Schools". Both have been welcomed by schools for their clarity and conciseness.
- 6.9 We actively encourage a variety of guest speakers to attend our meetings, including representatives from different faith groups as well as teachers and leaders who help deliver the Agreed Syllabus. This approach helps us gain a deeper understanding of their work and find the best ways to support them in enhancing the quality of religious education. This year, we welcomed Lois Burton, Primary Specialist Leader in Education for Religious Education who discussed her experience of the Agreed Syllabus and 'Understanding Christianity'. She also shared the use of Godly play resources and story sacks to enhance school environments. This includes persona dolls in Early Years to represent key characters from the major world faiths.

- 6.10 Ellie Canavan-White, Head of RE at The Priory School, Lewes, reported positive experiences of the syllabus and discussed strengthening it through regular review questions at the end of lessons and units to support understanding and assessment. A key challenge is inconsistent prior knowledge in Year 7, particularly differences in RE knowledge between community and church schools, especially in Christianity. Assessment includes knowledge checks and extended writing tasks, and opportunities for closer collaboration with feeder primary schools have been explored.
- 6.11 Each meeting has a budget update and closes with consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. An updated 'Constitution' was considered and adopted over the course of the year. All other documents are on a two year review cycle to ensure Members discharge their statutory duties effectively. Members have also begun to consider the implications for Religious Education following the release of the Curriculum and assessment review Final Report in November 2025.
- 6.12 SACRE receives a budget of £10,000 which sustains our main activities – though this would need to be reviewed when we hold the next Agreed Syllabus Conference. Given the proposed reorganisation of local government, SACRE has determined it appropriate to extend the current Agreed Syllabus by one additional year at the next Agreed Syllabus Conference to align with new Local Authority structures.
- 6.13 Given the licence fees for the current Agreed Syllabus have been paid, the budget covers the costs of the accompanying training package from RE Today, engagement with NASACRE including attendance to their annual conference, as well as the provision of a Specialist RE Advisor and two Subject Network Leads. SACRE is also supported by a Children's Services Representative and an experienced Clerk.

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:
- Consider the financial and strategic implications of a one year extension to the Agreed Syllabus Conference, to ensure continuity and effective consultation during local government reorganisation and potential changes to county council structures.
 - Continue to support SACRE in sustaining and diversifying its membership, so that representation reflects the breadth of faiths, beliefs, and worldviews across the county.
 - Maintain investment in professional development, subject networks, and advisory capacity, recognising their positive impact on curriculum quality, inclusion, and teacher confidence.
 - Promote SACRE's role within the school led system, including its work on community cohesion, Collective Worship, and good practice, to ensure schools are aware of the statutory support available.

Councillor Colin Belsey

Chair of SACRE