

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 16 March 2023

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

RECOMMENDATION:

The 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.

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. SACRE advises the Local Authority on matters relating to Religious Education and Collective Worship. This report is a public document sent also to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Department for Education (DFE).
- 1.2 For schools, this year has been as demanding as any other. Children and young people in many ways are still recovering from the disruption to their lives. For SACRE too this has brought both challenges and opportunities. Although we have been unable to visit schools, we have strengthened our Subject Network Meetings, and whilst information on school performance has been limited, the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus was extremely successful.
- 1.3 SACRE meetings continue to be well-attended by a committed group of individuals who remain well-informed about the current educational landscape. Broadly, discussions have focused on the quality of the new Agreed Syllabus, the continuity of Collective Worship and how best SACRE can support schools in delivery of their Statutory duties. SACRE has begun a process of ongoing self-evaluation and development planning both of which have become standing items on the agenda.

2 Statutory responsibilities – The Local Agreed Syllabus

- 2.1 The new Agreed Syllabus, ‘Faith and Belief in the 21st Century’ is the statutory curriculum for all maintained schools in the county for first teaching from September 2022. It was developed with external advice from RE Today and significant consultation with school and subject leaders, children, young people, and their families. The curriculum also covers a second resource, ‘Understanding Christianity’, taught by most of our diocesan schools. This has ensured the syllabus has broad appeal.
- 2.2 The new Agreed Syllabus is up to date and relevant, focusing on the major world religions whilst allowing for wider world views and thematic, moral, and ethical questions. Teaching,

learning and assessment centres on three strands: making sense of beliefs; understanding the impact; and making connections. SACRE has facilitated the provision of extensive resources and training. New schemes of work cover Key Stages 1 to 3 whilst a core programme of study for Key Stage 4 has been developed by several teachers, the RE Advisor and external support from RE Today.

- 2.3 A significant programme of professional development has been offered to all schools engaging with the new Agreed Syllabus. Two free launch events were provided covering the new Agreed Syllabus and Understanding Christianity. Attendance to these events allowed delegates to access further free planning materials. 89% of all primary schools and 87% of all secondary schools including academies engaged with the training offer. A small number of Special Schools have also begun engagement with training. Feedback has been very positive about these events.
- 2.4 A 3-year programme of training and development with RE Today is being delivered through the Subject Network Meetings. As a result, these meetings have increased in popularity and, in turn, improved SACRE's ability to support colleagues across the county in especially those with limited subject expertise. Much of this training has been led by experts in their field such as Lat Blaylock. Subject Network Meetings also allow for ongoing feedback from colleagues into further development of the syllabus and training offer.
- 2.5 A recent survey of those that attend such meetings told us that 90% of respondents found the launch events helped with implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus; 80% went on to implement the new Agreed Syllabus; and 90% drew on the training they had been offered. In terms of additional support, respondents requested more shared resources; further discussions at Subject Network Meetings; and additional training from RE Today. Subject Network Meetings are offered three times a year as evening twilight. Access to training has improved since a move to online delivery.
- 2.6 The syllabus is under licence for five years for all schools in East Sussex. All costs have been met by SACRE including an initial programme of training and professional development. We are delighted that several primary and secondary academies have also decided to adopt the new Agreed Syllabus.
- 2.7 Monitoring activities, which often includes visits to schools, have been extremely limited but conversely participation with the Subject Network Meetings has increased. On average, we have seen six secondary schools represented at secondary meetings and, on occasion, more than forty primary schools represented. Regular reports are made to SACRE by Network Leads who articulate the strengths and next steps for schools. This has allowed Members to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the needs of schools and tailor future support to meet their needs. It is evident schools truly value Religious Education and are committed to high-quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- 2.8 Members have been keen to see implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus for themselves but have been mindful about placing additional pressures on schools. Therefore, time has been taken to establish new protocols for school visits that will focus on identifying beacons of good practice and building a system of school-to-school support. School visits will return in spring 2023.
- 2.9 Although candidates returned to sit GCSE and GCSE Religious Studies examinations in Summer 2022, the pandemic unevenly impacted outcomes. Children and young people experienced significant and irregular disruption to their learning. SACRE's use of data was limited due to advice not to compare schools or performance from previous years. Other factors making comparison problematic include examination boards providing candidates with some of the exam content in advance to assist with revision and examiners building in generosity for candidates when setting grade boundaries.

3 Statutory responsibilities – Collective Worship

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of SACRE to monitor schools' statutory responsibility to hold Collective Worship. The pandemic has made it difficult for some schools to maintain an effective programme of Collective Worship. One of SACRE's priorities over the coming year will be to support schools in developing this area of practice.
- 3.2 Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship. Guidance on good practice and protocols for withdrawal is available to schools; the RE Advisor is available if further support is 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 Procedure will be reviewed in March 2023.

4 Links with other organisations

- 4.1 SACRE continues to keep in touch with national events and views. The Chairperson is a former member of the NASACRE Executive and plays an active role in their discussions. He also maintains good links with other national organisations such as the Religious Education Council (REC). The launch of the new Agreed Syllabus has renewed 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 to Members on national, regional, and local issues. Training accessed this year includes: 'How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE', 'SACREs – a way forward' and 'Effective use of self-evaluation'.
- 4.3 The RE Adviser attends south-central meetings to explore good practice from around the region as well as making links with the newly formed RE Regional Hub. She is also an executive member of AREIAC and keeps up to date with national reports and research linked to Religion and Worldviews. SACRE continues to work closely with RE Today on implementing the new Agreed Syllabus.

5 Other areas of work

- 5.1 Free annual training is offered to support governors in their role as well as deepening their understanding of the new Agreed Syllabus. Our last session was held in February 2022 and our next event is planned for later this year. These events provide an opportunity to consult with governors on the new Agreed Syllabus. Take up for these events is positive with typically more than 40 delegates attending from across the county with feedback being 100% good or better.

6 SACRE arrangements

- 6.1 There were three meetings of SACRE during 2022, held in a hybrid format consisting of in-person and online attendance enabling all our meetings to be quorate. Meetings were held:
 - 23rd November 2021 Attendance: 57%
 - 16th March 2022 Attendance: 57%
 - 16th June 2022 Attendance: 57%

An Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) was also held on 5th January 2022. Attendance was 63%.

- 6.2 The meeting of 16th March 2022 was the Annual General Meeting (AGM). 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 have reasonably wide representation across faiths and from those of no faith. In addition, we have long-serving Unitarian, Bahai and Jewish Members alongside a new Muslim Member. Despite seeking out Buddhist and Ukrainian Orthodox support to strengthen our membership, we have been unable to recruit. SACRE remains mindful of the need to fully represent the diversity of faith and belief in the county. Similarly, Members reflect the range of schools across the county and include diocesan, maintained, academies, and special schools.
- 6.4 SACRE has benefitted from having a different member of the community join each meeting 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 served. Other regular items include feedback from Primary and Secondary Subject Network Meetings as well as the work being undertaken with Special Schools.
- 6.5 The 3-year development plan is regularly updated, and self-evaluation is a standing item. This process has identified several priorities for the year ahead. These include embedding systems for school visits, monitoring and understanding the quality of provision; updating supporting documentation considering the new Agreed Syllabus and improving access for all stakeholders; providing additional support for the delivery of effective Collective Worship; and ensuring SACRE has broad representation reflecting different faiths and beliefs in the county.
- 6.6 Each meeting has a Budget update and closes with consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Both the SACRE Constitution and Code of Conduct were updated and approved in March 2022 to ensure they reflect and support the work undertaken in the discharge of our statutory duties.
- 6.7 SACRE had a budget of £15,000 for this financial year which has secured specialist advice and support enabling SACRE to fulfil its duties. It also allowed for the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus including costs for licensing and ongoing support including training and resources from RE Today. Funding also supported the growth of Subject Network Meetings. SACRE has also been supported by Children's Services through provision of a Representative alongside high-quality clerking.
- 6.8 It is important that future funding is sufficient to support effective delivery of the new Agreed Syllabus, secure engagement of all schools across the county and build capacity for high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. With such demonstrably high levels of engagement, SACRE would like to continue its support for all schools and academies in meeting their statutory duties.

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 its ongoing work to seek improvements to Religious Education provision.
 - Where possible, support diverse representation of Members to ensure SACRE reflects the wide range of faith and belief across the county.

Councillor Roy Galley
Chair of SACRE