

The Solihull Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Annual Report 2024-2025



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Section 1: Introduction

A message from the Chair of the Solihull SACRE

It continues to be an immense privilege to Chair Solihull's SACRE meetings. I am passionate about the role which constantly inspires me. I am incredibly well-supported by members of the Solihull SACRE, several of whom are long serving. These members have accrued a great deal of knowledge and experience from which we and our schools collectively benefit.

The Solihull SACRE's two priorities for 2024-2025, following the disruption to RE teaching and learning during the pandemic, have been and continue to be:

- Improving standards and quality of provision in RE;
- Standing down the Agreed Syllabus Conference, having completed the review, and launching Solihull's 2025-2030 agreed syllabus.

The SACRE has welcomed new members including several teachers to Group C. Our Humanist UK representative has been an invaluable appointment to Group A. We also have a new Vice-Chair who brings a wealth of experience in teaching and leading RE in a voluntary aided church school.

An interim report from the ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review was recently published with RE being mentioned under 'subjects not on the national curriculum'. The interim report states that:

'Despite the fact that RE is compulsory for all pupils up to the age of 18 (unless they are withdrawn), evidence suggests that a lack of national agreed content standards has led to national disparities in the quality of provision. Similar sentiments have been raised in the Call for Evidence responses and in a Review roundtable with RE organisations. There is a balance to be struck between securing an entitlement to high quality content for all, and, particularly in the case of RE, the need for flexibility to be retained for different school types (i.e., schools with a religious designation and those without). We will consider these points through our analysis of each different subject before publishing our final report'.

Schools, the Solihull SACRE, the Local Authority, parents, carers and young people eagerly await the final report in the autumn of 2025 and its implications. We welcome positive changes in RE and hope to see the subject having greater prominence in schools and being led by RE experts who possess a deep understanding of both content and pedagogy in RE.

Solihull SACRE's mission is to ensure that all schools in the borough are compliant with their statutory duties relating to pupil entitlement to Religious Education. We recognise how RE helps pupils to respect others and gain a broader understanding of views and beliefs, whilst contributing to a more cohesive community.

Our priorities continue to be sharply focused on making a difference to the RE learning that children and young people experience in classrooms, enabled by confident and knowledgeable teachers who enhance pupils' academic and personal development whilst preparing them well for a life well-lived in modern Britain.

Bev Petch

Chair of Solihull SACRE

Meetings

The SACRE has had four scheduled meetings during 2024-2025. Two of these were Agreed Syllabus Conferences with an element of SACRE core business also being addressed.

2 nd October 2024	Agreed Syllabus Conference reconvened
5 th November 2024	SACRE meeting Update from Chair's meeting with RE Today Consulting with schools on agreed syllabus Update on regional Re Hubs
5 th February 2025	Agreed Syllabus Conference reconvened Three options for locally agreed syllabus presented for consideration Agreed syllabus updates NATRE document: RE legal requirements for different types of schools
26 th March 2025	Updates on launch of the new agreed syllabus Interim report, Curriculum and Assessment Review comments on RE The need for formal LA approval to avoid any legal challenge.

Meetings are typically held virtually on MS Teams which supports members in attending meetings. We are mindful that SACRE meetings and Agreed Syllabus Conferences should be held in public unless there are confidential items to be discussed. Plans are in place to advertise meetings on the Council website, with links to the online meetings.

Section 2: RE (statutory responsibilities)

In 2023, Solihull SACRE developed an online survey for all schools in Solihull to complete and return. The purpose was to enable SACRE, and therefore the local authority, to have greater strategic oversight of RE and collective worship in our family of schools. The level of responses was disappointing at just below 25% of schools. This did not provide sufficient information to provide a complete picture across our schools. However, the responses provided insight into RE and collective worship in twenty schools: eight maintained schools and twelve academies.

The SACRE continues to have significant gaps in its knowledge about RE leadership and provision across our family of schools. Recent consultation with RE subject leaders has again yielded disappointingly few responses.

We know that some schools are not meeting their statutory duties in relation to the RE entitlement for all pupils, apart from those who have been withdrawn. The SACRE will arrange to have an open conversation with leaders at these schools, offering SACRE support.

Standards and the monitoring of RE

This is currently a significant priority for the Solihull SACRE. The RE and collective worship survey has provided some assurance, but this is insufficient due to low numbers of responses. SACRE needs to optimise opportunities to gather information both formally and informally to gain an

accurate, composite picture. The survey does pinpoint where we need to be professionally curious and where some further challenge and support may be necessary. We are not aware of any schools in our locality having applied for or achieved REQM awards. No recent requests for determinations have been made.

SACRE has advised the Local Authority as to its statutory duties including adequately funding the work of SACRE in carrying out its functions.

Compliance

LA statutory responsibilities:

The LA must:

Ensure there is a SACRE	In place
Ensure all four groups are represented on the SACRE	In place
Establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) and appoint members to it	In place and process ongoing
Ensure there is an Agreed Syllabus, reviewed every five years	ASC convened October 2023
Ensure funds and support are in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties	Not yet in place
Take note of and respond to advice from the SACRE	In place

It is the LA's responsibility to appoint members of the SACRE and the ASC.

The LA should:

Seek nominations from the organisations to be represented	In place
Ensure those appointed are representative of the religion, worldview, denomination or sponsoring group in question	In place
It is good practice for the SACRE to review its constitution periodically to ensure membership is appropriately representative and to advise the LA of any necessary amendments	Constitution reviewed and finalised January 2023. Includes code of conduct for SACRE members.

SACRE statutory responsibilities

A SACRE must:

Advise the local authority (LA) on matters related to agreed syllabus Religious Education (RE) and Collective worship (CW) either in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit	Partially in place
Publish an Annual Report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups	2023-24 and 2024-25 Annual Reports developed
Email a copy of the Annual Report to the Secretary of State.	2023-24 and 2024-25 Annual Reports submitted to DfE
Meet in public, unless confidential information is to be disclosed	Meetings are online. The public can attend.

Make minutes of its meetings available for inspection at LA offices	Dedicated Council website page under development
Consider appeals from schools wishing to modify the legal requirement for most acts of collective worship to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character; this procedure is called a 'determination' as SACRE determines whether to agree the appeal.	No recent determinations, but SACRE is equipped for this

An effective SACRE should:

Monitor the provision and quality of agreed syllabus RE and of Collective Worship to provide targeted advice and support on teaching agreed syllabus RE	RE and CW survey has identified gaps. SACRE to advise LA.
Advise the LA on the provision of training of teachers	Not yet in place. Potential partnering with RE Today.
Consider complaints about RE and Collective Worship referred to them by their LA	No recent complaints, but SACRE is equipped to respond
Consider whether changes need to be made to the agreed syllabus, in partnership with the LA	ASC was convened to review the agreed syllabus. Launch 9 April 2025
Offer advice to the LA in respect of the agreed syllabus and its implementation	In place, current ASC

A SACRE may:

Require the LA to review its Agreed Syllabus	Agreed Syllabus Conference appointed. Process completed.
Decide to advise the LA on matters to do with RE and CW	In place, SACRE advise as required.
Co-opt individuals who are not members of any of the groups, for example to provide educational expertise, the views of young people and children, or religious and non-religious views that reflect a diverse multi-cultural society.	No current co-opted members

SACRE self-evaluation (currently draft and awaiting SACRE discussion and sign-off)

Key focus area	Evaluation
Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders	Developing
Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education	Established
The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus	Established
Collective Worship	Requires Improvement/ Developing
Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community	Established

Collective Worship (statutory responsibilities):

Processes are being designed to enable appropriate monitoring of collective worship in schools. This is likely to include monitoring through scrutiny of Ofsted reports (which rarely yield relevant information), conversations with schools, teacher groups, website trawls, presentations from teachers. The recent Agreed Syllabus Conference, now stood down, will ensure wide consultation with schools and many other partners. The SACRE anticipates the need to develop guidance with our schools and to then monitor the impact.

Defining Collective Worship:

- It is mandatory for all pupils in all maintained schools and should take place daily;
- It comprises pupils who are part of the same educational community; they may possess diverse religious, agnostic and non-religious life stances (NB called 'corporate worship' if all share the same religious beliefs);
- It may take many forms, but always presents pupils with specific concepts, themes and thoughts;
- It can use structures of religious worship but does not require actual worship;
- It allows deep thinking and individual spiritual responses to the concepts explored;
- It is not corporate worship!

The Solihull Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education

Solihull's locally Agreed Syllabus for RE was launched in 2018 and is now outdated. It is available at <https://www.solgrid.org.uk/sacre/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2019/01/Agreed-Syllabus-July-2018.pdf>

We have partnered with our expert colleagues at RE Today to work with us on Solihull's new 2025 to 2030 agreed syllabus. This will have a soft online launch in April 2025 with all schools invited regardless of their maintained, academy or independent status. Five-year licenses are being purchased for our maintained schools who are required to teach RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus. Other schools are strongly encouraged to buy into the new syllabus. We believe that the new syllabus is a step change. It is unapologetically ambitious for all pupils, including those with additional needs. There is also a stronger emphasis on worldviews.

Section 3: other information

Determinations for collective worship

No schools have requested determinations in recent years.

In January 1994, the Department for Education released Circular 1/94, which states that all maintained schools must provide 'daily collective worship for all registered pupils' and that this 'must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. Circular 1/94

It is acknowledged that this may not be appropriate for all pupils in all schools. The determination lifts or modifies this requirement for some or all pupils, while safeguarding the interests of children from Christian families. Maintained schools under the control of their local authority may, therefore, apply to the local SACRE for a 'determination'.

Academies should apply for a 'determination' directly to the Department for Education (DfE).

Teacher training and resources

The Solihull SACRE is currently exploring a partnership with RE Today and/or other organisations that provide Religious Education expertise. The SACRE does not benefit from having an RE adviser supporting its work over time, despite it being a statutory responsibility on the local authority to ensure funds and support are in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties.

Opportunities for schools to access high-quality resources and continuing professional development are promoted through the LA's weekly communication to all schools. This includes promoting the RE Hubs, NATRE, RE Today and Culham St Gabriel's - who champion religion and worldviews education - plus other RE associated networks. Information about RE and schools' legal duties have been shared with Governing Bodies on GovernorHub. Specific training for Governors on the legal responsibilities on schools in relation to RE and collective worship was provided in the summer term 2024 as part of Solihull's 2024-25 governor training package. The training was led by the SACRE Chair and was exceptionally well received. It clearly addressed some important gaps in governors' knowledge about RE and its statutory status in all schools.

Links with other bodies

Solihull SACRE is a full, subscribing member of NASACRE; the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. The membership allows SACRE members to take part in useful training and enables the Chair and clerk to circulate materials to support the work of the SACRE. The membership is invaluable to the work of Solihull's SACRE.

The Chair is involved in annual arrangements for Holocaust Memorial Day. A member of the SACRE is part of the local inter-faith network. The forum exists to bring together faith groups who are interested in fostering greater mutual understanding and friendship. The Chair of SACRE attends regional West Midlands meetings, organised by the RE Hub.

SACRE's own arrangements (statutory responsibilities):

The LA supports the SACRE by providing professional and administrative support from an experienced clerk. This arrangement has been in place for several years. There is currently no RE adviser attached to the SACRE, but this expertise and related funding is being sought. Increased membership for the SACRE is ensuring quoracy and adding to the dynamic of the SACRE, particularly with the more recently joined teachers in Group C.

Circulation details for this Annual Report:

- All members of Solihull SACRE
- All schools in Solihull
- Director and Assistant Director of Children's Services and Skills
- NASACRE
- Department for Education
- To be shared on the Council's website page

Appendix 1: 2024 GCSE and A level outcomes

This section would typically outline 2024 outcomes in Religious Studies. Unfortunately, the Department for Education (DfE) have delayed the release of the data files for 2024. All 153 local authorities are in the same situation.

There is no expected date currently provided by the DfE but the NCER, who will have the first access to the file, have raised the issue as a matter of urgency.