

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SUNDERLAND

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

2023-24

Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Chair of SACRE Comment
3. Meetings
4. Religious Education (Statutory Responsibilities)
 - 4.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in Schools
 - 4.2 Training, Monitoring, and Other Information
5. Collective Worship
6. Links with Other Bodies
7. SACRE Local Involvement
8. Management of SACRE, Working in Partnership
 - 8.1 SACRE Membership
 - 8.2 Training for SACRE Members
 - 8.3 SACRE Funding and Support

1. Introduction

Sunderland Council has statutory obligations relating to Religious Education in the City. This report summarises those statutory requirements and sets out key aspects of how they have been met in the academic year September 2023-July 2024. This annual report has been prepared by the Sunderland Council Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). Members of SACRE are representative of churches and other religious traditions in the region, teachers' associations and elected councillors. SACRE members donate their time and are not paid for their services. Religious Education is required by law and contributes to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination.

2. The Chair of SACRE Comment

The year 2023-24 has been another busy one for Sunderland SACRE with continued embedding of the Agreed Syllabus, ably supported by our RE consultant, Cathryn Forbes, through professional advice and training sessions for teachers. However, we must also note Cathryn's farewell as she stepped down from her role supporting SACRE, midway through this year, a position which she held since September 2014. We are so grateful to Cathryn for many years of faithful service. I wish to thank Cathryn for her dedication to SACRE, to our schools, to our young people and to great RE in Sunderland. We wish her well in her retirement!

Quoracy has improved somewhat but remains a challenge. It has been wonderful to hear more from our teachers on SACRE, and of their experiences of the Agreed Syllabus and the RE support offered.

There have been changes in membership in Group D. We welcomed some new councillors and said goodbye to Councillors Samuels, Smith and Williams. We have welcomed a co-opted Humanist representative as well a new Pagan member to Group B to increase our representation of the community that we serve. Thanks must go to our clerk, Paul Wood, for all his efforts in welcoming new members.

SACRE relies on the contributions of its members and the local authority officers. I would like to thank our members for their commitment this year, particularly those involved in the collective worship working group. Special thanks go too to our Vice-Chair, Amy Clarke, for all her work and support this year. I would also like to express gratitude to our clerk, Paul Wood, our local authority officer, Richard Cullen, and our outgoing specialist adviser, Cathryn Forbes, who all serve SACRE so well and are key to its success. We look forward to welcoming a new local authority adviser in the coming academic year to fulfil our outgoing RE consultant's responsibilities to SACRE as well as supporting RE in Sunderland schools.

Caroline Weir

Chair of Sunderland SACRE

3. Meetings

This academic year saw 'in person' meetings, taking place on 17.10.23, 19.03.24 & 18.06.24.

After being appointed in June, we welcomed new Chair, Caroline Weir, and Vice Chair, Amy Clarke.

Mrs. Forbes retired as a specialist officer and was sincerely thanked for her dedicated service. Mr. Christopher Barrass was appointed as the new RE Advisor and he will provide support for SACRE going forward.

New members were approved increasing representation from the Teachers association. It has been noted that there was an increase in membership diversity, with more faiths now represented within the SACRE.

4. RE (Statutory Responsibilities)

4.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in schools

In October 2023, Lat Blaylock from RE Today conducted a training conference attended by representatives from 45 schools. The session focused on creative teaching methods for teaching Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Of the schools that attended, 37 completed an evaluation, with 36 rating the session as "very good" and 1 as "good."

Schools have since been able to download all the resources from the event and take advantage of discounts to purchase additional support materials, facilitating their delivery of the Agreed Syllabus.

The training was provided free of charge to the schools. By hosting the event in-house and managing catering internally, significant cost savings were achieved, allowing for the possibility of additional programs or events. The event also provided valuable networking opportunities for educators and stakeholders.

Ofsted Report Discussion: The SACRE reviewed the Ofsted report from November, which raised concerns about the current state of Religious Education (RE) in schools. It was noted that many schools are failing to meet the statutory requirement to teach RE across all key stages. Additionally, RE is often undervalued, treated as an afterthought in the curriculum. As a result, pupils are not receiving the depth of education necessary to engage meaningfully with the diverse, multi-religious, and multi-secular society in which they live. The SACRE recognises the urgent need for a coordinated effort to enhance the quality of RE provision in schools.

The SACRE highlighted challenges in local RE provision. Community schools struggle with limited staff expertise and a lack of faith backgrounds. Some academies follow the agreed syllabus but need more support. There are regional difficulties in recruiting RE teachers and local training is limited.

SACRE discussed several ways to support teacher development including improving teachers' subject knowledge, ensuring access to professional development, allocating regular and sufficient time for RE lessons and having a well-organised curriculum that allows pupils to deepen their understanding. These recommendations will be integrated into SACRE's Development Plan moving forward.

4.2 Training, Monitoring and Other Information

Through Together for Children, the SACRE RE advisor offers comprehensive training to schools. Chris Barrass has been appointed as the local RE support advisor and will lead the training sessions in the next academic year. These sessions will provide opportunities for networking, where participants are encouraged to bring examples of students' work and resources developed using the Agreed Syllabus. In addition, the training will serve as a forum for discussing national trends and key topics in religious education, while also identifying any further support that teachers may require.

SACRE provides a regular termly newsletter to all schools. Topics covered included:

- Review of the recent Conference Day.
- Details about the Sacred Arts Competition.
- Information on Interfaith Week and the Interfaith Walk scheduled for 19th November.
- Inclusion of the Holocaust Memorial Event details.
- Potential collaboration with the Faith Museum for future events.
- A feature from the Sunderland Interfaith Forum in the spring newsletter.
- New Agreed Syllabus
- Spotlight on the North East Religious Resource Centre
- RE CPD News from the North East Religious Resource Centre

Each newsletter always includes CPD that is being provided.

SACRE has reviewed the preliminary findings of the RE GCSE results for Sunderland Schools for the 2023/24 academic year, and they are as follows:

A total of 995 entries were recorded (no indication as to which course).

99% of entries achieved a Grade 1–9, compared to the national figure of 97%.

73% of entries achieved a Grade 4–9, compared to the national figure of 71%.

62% of entries achieved a Grade 5–9, compared to the national figure of 60%.

Sunderland's performance demonstrates a slightly higher achievement rate than the national averages across all grade bands

5. Collective worship

Members including Ms. Weir attended NASACRE training focused on Collective Worship. The course highlighted the features of good collective worship.

A working group on Collective Worship has been established as previously discussed in SACRE meetings. The need to focus on Collective Worship was identified as part of self-evaluation. The group aims to explore ways to enhance collective worship practices and provide guidance with a view to developing a policy for SACRE consideration. As part of this process, a questionnaire was circulated in the summer term to schools to gather insights on current practices and identify areas where additional support may be needed.

6. Links with other bodies

Sunderland SACRE is a member of NASACRE and regularly uses their briefings for discussion during meetings. A walkthrough on accessing NASACRE's website, resources, training, and support was provided, with login details given to all SACRE members. Members were also informed about the annual conference, to be held in London on 20th May 2024, and were encouraged to attend, with places being fully funded by SACRE.

A summary of the National Content Standards for RE in England document has been shared which offers clarity on RE provision.

7. SACRE local involvement

Both local Christian Dioceses have members on the Sunderland SACRE.

The Sunderland Interfaith Forum and local faith leaders offered to provide talks and additional support to schools.

8 Management of SACRE, working in partnership

8.1 SACRE membership

The membership of Sunderland Local Authority SACRE is listed in the Appendix. Membership has increased across the four 'committees' resulting in more meetings being quorate. SACRE continues to work with the local authority in identifying faith/community leaders to continue to expand membership.

8.2 Training for SACRE members

Members have made use of the training materials offered by NASACRE. SACRE agreed to fund travel expenses for two delegates to attend the NASACRE Conference on 20th May in York.

8.3 SACRE funding and support

Sunderland LA has not reduced the SACRE budget and has a commitment to support SACRE for funding.

SACRE has made a commitment to use funding to provide CPD to support the development of RE in schools.

SACRE has been well supported by the clerk to SACRE, provided by the Law and Governance Team.

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

CLLR DODDS	
CLLR O'BRIEN	
CLLR SAMUELS	
CLLR P. SMITH	
CLLR WILLIAMS	

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS AND OTHER RELIGIONS

MATT MOORE	
MRS SYEDA FAHMENA KHATUN	
REV DR DAVID WHITING	
MR TONY WORTMAN	
MRS ELIZABETH WORTMAN	
MR MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL	
IMAN YUSEF MEAH	
MR DHAVALKUMAR VYAS	
MR ZAF IQBAL	

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

MISS CAROLINE WEIR	
MRS AMY CLARKE	
REV CHRIS HOWSON	
NICKY ANDERSON	

TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS

MISS NICOLA JACKMAN	
MRS FIONA MATTHEWS	
MS GEMMA HAWLEY	
MS LOUISE RIDINGS	
MS TRACY CONWAY	
MRS AMY CLARKE	
MS RACHEL WINLOW	
MR STEVEN BECK	

OFFICERS

RICHARD CULLEN	
CHRISTOPHER BARRASS	
PAUL WOOD	