

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TOWER HAMLETS STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) FOR 2023-2024

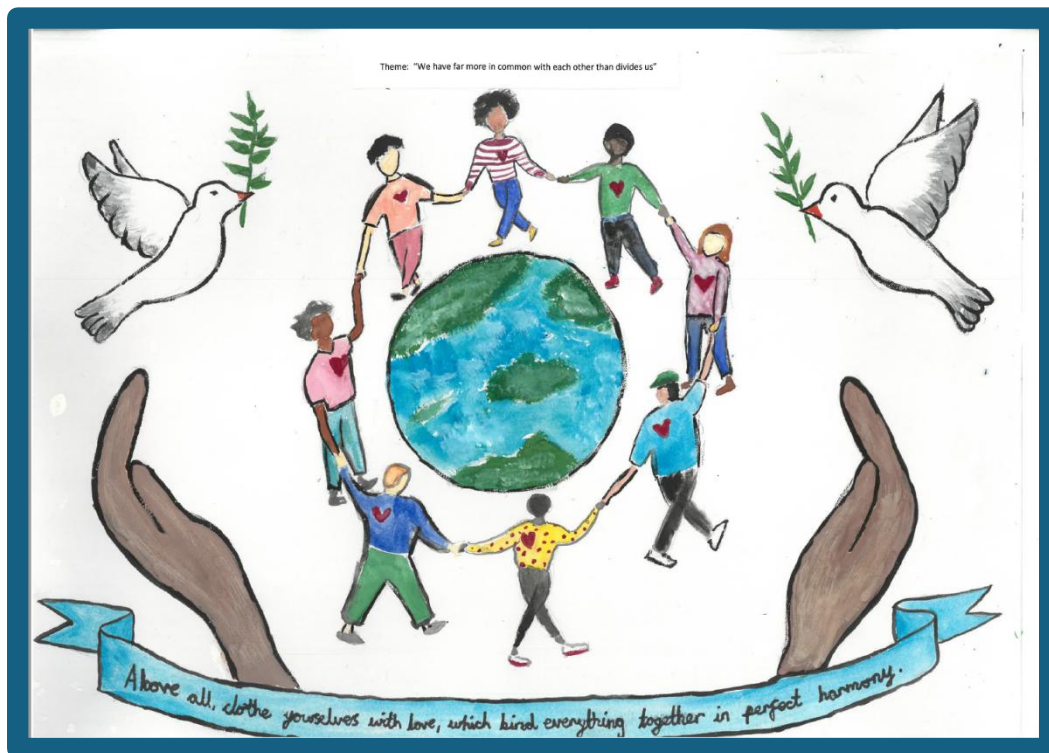


Image Credit :Year Four Christianna Lower Key Stage 2 Stewart Headlam School

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Annual Report of the Tower Hamlets Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) 2023-2024

Introduction

Since 1988, it has been a requirement that every local authority (LA) has a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

Though legislation sets out both the structure and the remit of a local SACRE - principally, overseeing religious education (RE) and collective worship - in practice every SACRE has developed its own particular style and character.

Tower Hamlets SACRE developed its own particular style, and character has over the years, as this report will testify.

It is a legislative requirement that each SACRE produces an annual report of its work and that this is published, sent to the local authority, to local schools and to other interested parties. One important element of the report is performance data and an analysis of the extent to which schools are meeting their legal duties in relation to RE. Validated GCSE data was not available until this month, hence the delay in the publication of the report. More recently, other datasets have been made available by the DfE, most significantly the school workforce data that supports the monitoring of the level of provision in secondary schools

Foreword by the Chair of SACRE

Chair's Report

It is with great pride and gratitude that I reflect on the past year for Tower Hamlets Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Despite the challenges we faced, 2023-2024 has been a year of significant achievements, ongoing dedication, and impactful initiatives that have strengthened Religious Education (RE) within our diverse borough.



One of the year's highlights has been the exceptional performance of our schools in RE. Tower Hamlets maintained the highest entry rate for Religious Studies GCSE nationally for the second consecutive year. Many of our schools achieved results well above the national average, a testament to the commitment of our educators and students. SACRE's support through curriculum development, teacher training, and the dissemination of resources has played a vital role in these successes.

This year also marked a renewed focus on celebrating diversity through creative engagement. The Spirited Arts Competition showcased the artistic talents of students across the borough, illustrating their understanding and appreciation of religious and non-religious worldviews. Special thanks go to Mrs. Weston, the late Ms. Lindsay, Mr. Silver, and Ms. Arundell for their dedication in organising and judging the competition. Every participating school had award-winning students, which we hope will inspire even greater participation next year.

Our commitment to professional development continued with the success of the "Lived Worldviews in Tower Hamlets" project. Led by myself, funded by Culham St. Gabriel's Trust, this initiative created videos exploring diverse religious and non-religious perspectives, bringing those voices into the classroom.

We were honoured to host a delegation from Norway once again, with students and lecturers visiting local schools. Their feedback highlighted the exceptional practices in RE and interfaith and belief engagement that define Tower Hamlets. I extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to this successful exchange.

Nationally, SACRE supported key developments, including endorsing the Religious Education Council's National Content Standard and engaging with the RE Hubs initiative. These efforts reflect our commitment to ensuring high-quality, inclusive RE for all students.

This year, we also bid farewell to our Chair, Carolyn Lindsay, whose visionary leadership and tireless advocacy for RE have left an indelible legacy. Carolyn's efforts in fostering interfaith and belief understanding and ensuring student engagement have set a standard of excellence that will guide us in the years to come. As a teacher, resident and SACRE member I was supported in many ways by Carolyn and wish to continue her legacy as Chair.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of SACRE members, our adviser, local educators, and our partners, including Culham St. Gabriel's Trust and the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership. Your collaboration and passion are the foundation of our success.

As we look ahead, our priorities remain clear: strengthening teacher recruitment, addressing membership gaps, and continuing to advocate for a robust and inclusive RE curriculum. Together, we will build on this year's accomplishments and continue to inspire our students to explore and appreciate the diverse worldviews around them. Thank you all for your unwavering commitment to Religious Education in Tower Hamlets.

Ruth Marx

Chair of Tower Hamlets SACRE

Tribute to Carolyn Lindsay



It is with great sadness that we reflect on the passing of Carolyn Lindsay in 2024. As Chair of Tower Hamlets SACRE, Carolyn was a pillar of dedication and leadership, championing religious education and interfaith and belief understanding in our borough. Her tireless efforts to foster inclusion and promote the highest standards of teaching have left an indelible mark on our community.

Carolyn's commitment to her role extended far beyond the meetings she chaired. She was instrumental in connecting educators, faith and belief representatives, and policymakers, ensuring that SACRE's work was not only relevant but impactful. Her ability to navigate complex discussions with grace and empathy earned her the respect and admiration of all who worked with her.

One of Carolyn's most notable achievements for SACRE, was her advocacy for student engagement in religious education, which resulted in Tower Hamlets maintaining one of the highest Religious Studies GCSE entry rates in the country, in several years, THE highest. She raised funds on behalf of SACRE so that we were able to offer an Ambassadors of Faith and Belief Project, training older pupils to talk about their faith and belief in RE lessons for primary schools. Her vision for education as a tool for understanding and unity will continue to inspire future generations.

On behalf of the entire SACRE community and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, we extend our deepest condolences to Carolyn's family, friends, and colleagues. Her legacy of service, compassion, and excellence will forever be remembered.

Membership

We are pleased to have welcomed new representatives to the SACRE, broadening our representation for the borough. The most recent membership of Tower Hamlets SACRE includes representatives from four groups:

- **Group A:** Representatives of Christian and other religious denominations (16 representatives total):
 1. Ms Sara Brown (Bahá'í Faith)
 2. Ms Caroline Pannell (Roman Catholic)
 3. Amalanandi - Ms Hannah Peaty (Buddhist)
 4. Mr Leon Silver (Jewish)
 5. Mr Nathan Uddin Gubbins (Muslim)
 6. Mr Birbahadur Singh Bance (Sikh)
 7. Ms Brigid Amoatin (Free Church)
 8. Ms Elaine Arundell (Roman Catholic)
 9. Ms Wahida Begum (Muslim)

- 10. Ms Gabrielle Ettridge (Roman Catholic)
- 11. Mr Aron O'Carroll (Society of Friends)
- 12. Mr John Opute (African Caribbean Pentecostal Church)
- 13. Mr Ram Chandra Saha (Hindu)
- 14. Ms Ruby Smith (Muslim)
- 15. Mr Philip Emery (Non-religious worldviews)
 - Vacancies: 2 Muslim Representatives
- **Group B:** Representatives of the Church of England (6 representatives total):
 - Ms Fiona Robb
 - Ms Mary Thorne
 - Ms Kate McNab
 - Mr Robert Scott
 - Vacancies: 2 Representatives
- **Group C:** Representatives from teaching associations (7 representatives total):
 - Ms Tahmina Chowdhury
 - Ms Ruth Marx
 - Ms Nasima Khanom
 - Ms Fahmida Khanum Uddin
 - Vacancies: 2 Representatives
- **Group D:** Local Authority representatives (4 representatives total):
 - Ms Carolyn Lindsay (Chair)
 - Councillor Jahed Choudhury
 - Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury
 - Councillor Abdul Wahid

In attendance:

- Mrs Deborah Weston (Advisor to SACRE)
- Ms Alison Gawthroe (THEP)
- Mr Angus J Huck (Clerk)

Meeting Dates

Tower Hamlets SACRE held three meetings during the academic year:

1. Monday, 27th November 2023 (Inquorate due to no Councillors being present)

2. Monday, 26th February 2024 (Quorate)
3. Monday, 24th June 2024 (Inquorate due to no Councillors being present)

Monitoring and Evaluation

Examination Results:

- Tower Hamlets continued to achieve above-average results in Religious Education (RE) GCSEs. In 2023, Tower Hamlets maintained the highest entry rate for RS GCSE nationally for the second consecutive year. Detailed data can be found in appendix B
- It was noted that RE contributes significantly to students' critical thinking and debate skills, positively influencing their performance in other subjects.

Support for Schools:

- SACRE members and advisors have actively engaged with schools to enhance RE teaching through resource sharing, including videos on lived worldviews and RE learning journeys.
- Efforts to address gaps in teacher recruitment and retention were prioritized, with initiatives such as promoting teaching RE as a career and encouraging shadowing opportunities for prospective teachers.
- Ruth Marx reported on developments of her **“Lived Worldviews in Tower Hamlets”** project that involved making a series of videos of people talking about their religious (and non-religious) ways of looking at the world. The main intended audience was to support in KS5 RE lessons. As Tower Hamlets is a very diverse place where many different world views could be found. Ruth wanted an opportunity to celebrate this. . Her project was being funded by Culham St Gabriels's Trust and has been presented at a national conference, as well as shared widely on the RE:Online platform.
- SACRE had hosted a **local Spirited Arts competition**. This had been partially successful. Fulsome thanks were due to Mrs Weston for putting together all the entries. These had been judged by Mrs Weston, Ms Lindsay, Mr Silver and Ms Arundell, who should be thanked for doing that. Prizes had been awarded and handed out. Every school that had submitted entries had children who had received an award. That would be a source of encouragement for future Spirited Arts Competition.

National Developments

Religious Education Council's National Content Standard:

- Tower Hamlets SACRE has formally supported the adoption of the National Content Standard, emphasizing its potential to ensure consistency and quality in RE teaching across the country.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of balancing national standards with local nuance to reflect the borough's diversity.

RE Hubs:

- Culham St Gabriels had funded the RE Hubs Project. The idea was to create a central group that would bring together all the local groups of RE teachers, and put in place a regional structure, Hub Leads and a Central Director. SACRE members were invited to register places of interest that teachers felt that pupils should visit locally. These could then be given a flag mark on the Hub website. Over 500 places had already been kite-marked. In addition, speakers could be accredited by the Hub, then kite-marked on the website. Our SACRE members have been made aware of both of these initiatives and encouraged to sign up.

OFSTED Report:

- OFSTED's annual report identified gaps in RE provision across the country. Tower Hamlets' strong performance was noted as an example of effective RE teaching.
- In April 2024, Ofsted published a subject report titled "Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report," examining the state of Religious Education (RE) in England's schools.

Key Findings:

- **Superficial Curriculum:** Many schools offer a curriculum that is broad but lacks depth, leading to students retaining little meaningful knowledge. Covering numerous religions superficially often results in misconceptions and a lack of substantial understanding.
- **Exam-Centric Teaching:** In secondary schools, RE instruction is frequently driven by exam requirements, with teachers focusing primarily on content needed for assessments. This approach can limit students' comprehensive understanding of the subject.
- **Non-Compliance with Statutory Requirements:** A significant number of schools fail to meet the legal obligation to teach RE across all key stages, resulting in gaps in students' religious and cultural education.

Recommendations:

- **Curriculum Development:** Schools should design and implement a distinct, rigorous, and challenging RE curriculum for all key stages. This curriculum should build progressively on students' prior knowledge, ensuring depth over breadth.
- **Beyond Exam Specifications:** Secondary school leaders should develop RE curricula that go beyond mere exam board specifications, fostering a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the subject.
- **Teacher Training:** Schools must ensure that all RE teachers possess strong subject knowledge and effective pedagogical skills to deliver high-quality instruction.
- **Timetabling Considerations:** RE should be scheduled thoughtfully to minimize gaps between lessons, allowing for continuity and reinforcement of learning.
- **Progressive Knowledge Building:** Opportunities should be provided for students to revisit and deepen their understanding over time, enabling them to connect prior learning with more complex concepts.

Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Training:

- SACRE focused on attracting new teacher representatives and enhancing professional development opportunities for existing teachers.
- Recruitment challenges were discussed at RE Network meetings.
- The reintroduction of a £10,000 bursary for secondary RE teacher training was welcomed as a step towards addressing national shortages.
- SACRE received regular updates from the leaders of the primary and secondary teacher network groups

Community Engagement:

- At each meeting, SACRE members reported on their activities related to Religious Education. SACRE members had participated in interfaith forums, school assemblies, round tables, hot seating activities and visits to places of worship and interest. They reported on how these events, not only supported RE, but also fostered community cohesion and promoted religious literacy.
- Projects like the Spirited Arts Competition and Lived Worldviews videos celebrated diversity and creativity in schools.

Advisory and Support Roles:

- SACRE supported schools with guidance on celebrating religious events inclusively, including updated resources like the Ramadan Guide.
- SACRE also facilitated school visits to local places of worship and interfaith dialogue sessions.

Norwegian visit



- Tower Hamlets SACRE were pleased to be invited to host this visit again. A group of about 20 Norwegian students and three lecturers had visited the following primary schools: Mowlem and St Saviour's, and the following secondary schools: Mulberry and Beal High School in Redbridge. (See image above). Mrs Lindsay thanked everybody who had helped with the visit. She considered the visit to have been very successful. The visitors had been very impressed by what they had seen and had made a lot of links with the schools. She felt that if the visit was repeated in 2024-2025, more SACRE Members might wish to attend part of it.

Publications:

- SACRE's Ramadan Guide had been updated, which was the document that helped support schools whilst pupils were fasting in Ramadan. The Guide included a message from Shaykh Abdul Qayum and was based on the London Unified Prayer Times.

Budget and Funding:

- Efforts to secure funding for the Ambassadors for Freedom of Belief (AFAB) initiative were ongoing. Alternative funding sources such as Culham St Gabriels and AREIAC were explored.

Conclusion

Tower Hamlets SACRE has continued to play a vital role in supporting and enhancing the quality of Religious Education in the borough. Despite challenges such as vacancies and funding constraints, SACRE remains committed to promoting religious literacy, fostering interfaith and belief understanding, and ensuring that all students benefit from a comprehensive and inclusive RE curriculum. Future priorities include addressing membership gaps and strengthening teacher recruitment.

Chair's Signature: Ruth Marx

Date: 21.01.25

Appendix A: Winning entries in the Tower Hamlets Spirited Arts Competition



Tower Hamlets Local Competition for NATRE Spirited Arts 2023

Tower Hamlets Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education launched a local competition in support of the NATRE National Spirited Arts Competition.

These slides show the winners, runners up for each age group and entries that were highly commended. Congratulations to all the pupils who entered the competition

The themes for the Spirited Arts competition in 2023 were:

- "We have more in common than what divides us"
- Green faith, green future? God's good earth?
- Where is God today?
- Faith in action, values in action
- Sacred space and holy buildings
- All God's Creatures?

1



Early Years Foundation Stage
Amaya from Elizabeth Selby Infant School

WINNER

2



Early Years Foundation Stage
Sayma from Elizabeth Selby Infant School

RUNNER UP

5



I think Allah is everywhere to protect us. Allah is near and far us. He is there when I go to sleep. He is there when I go outside. He is there when I go to school. He is there when I go to dad's house. He is there for me. He is with me when I go to sleep.

Sulayman, Key Stage 1 Bluegate Fields Infant School

WINNER

6



I think God lives in a rainbow because that is a colourful place and there's green for the leaves, blue for the sky and white for the clouds. It makes the rainbow and sin and rain.

Maryam Key Stage 1 Bluegate Fields Infant School

RUNNER UP



Aayot Elizabeth Selby Infants Key Stage 1

Highly Commended



Highly Commended

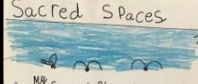
Zacharia, Bluegate Fields Infants Key Stage 1

I think God lives in the park because he likes the nature he made. He made the green grass and bright yellow sun and the pink and purple flowers, the big enormous green hills, green brown trees.

Maria Olga Primary School
Key Stage 1


"My sacred place is at the park because it makes me calm to touch the grass".

Highly Commended




The drawing is titled 'Sacred Spaces' in a simple, hand-drawn font. It depicts a park scene with a large green tree in the center, a green grassy area at the bottom, and a blue sky with a sun and clouds. The text 'My Sacred Place is at the park because it makes me calm to touch the grass' is written across the middle of the drawing.

9


WINNER

Hamza
Lower Key Stage 2
Mowlem Primary School
Sacred Spaces and
Holy Buildings




10

I've chosen a hospital as a Sacred Place.
• I think a hospital is sacred because it is
a place of spring and joy. There is
life and death in one building. When
you go to the hospital you start
on your afterlife. Hamza

Aaliyah
Lower Key Stage 2
Halley Primary
School

Aaliyah
 Lower Key Stage 2
 Halley Primary
 School



RUNNER
 UP

We have made an announcement
 that 'which business' is
 the business we have
 took of your hand about all
 just the same we have the same in
 that say some different we have the
 same money as we pay for our
 card look of your money and some
 the each the rest of the different
 look is big for you


My work show that we are
 a kind of business with other
 that care for us and
 that we are the same
 about it
 Halley primary

A colorful illustration depicting a group of diverse children holding hands in a circle around a globe. Two white doves, each holding an olive branch, fly above the globe. Two large hands are shown at the bottom, supporting the globe. A blue banner at the bottom contains the text: "All are to be united in peace and love, and all shall be saved." The entire illustration is enclosed in a black rectangular frame.

Liyana
Lower Key Stage 2
Mowlem Primary School

Sacred Spaces and Holy
Buildings

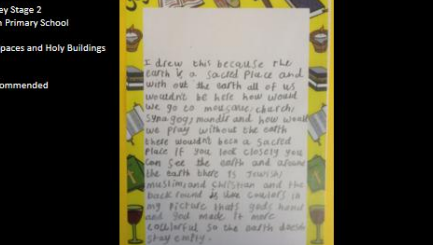
Highly Commended

A child's drawing on a yellow background. It features a globe with green continents and blue oceans. Five small figures in various colored outfits (red, purple, blue, green, and brown) are standing on top of the globe. A large, stylized hand with orange and yellow fingers is reaching up from the bottom, holding the globe. The background is filled with a dense, textured pattern of blue, green, and brown speckles.

Liyana
Lower Key Stage 2
Mowlem Primary School

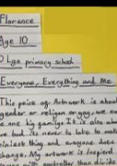
Sacred Spaces and Holy Buildings

Highly Commended



I drew this because the earth is a sacred place and with out the earth all of us wouldn't be here how would we go to mowlem clearly 5000 years ago and how would we stay without the earth that wouldn't been a sacred place if we had electricity we can see the earth and above the earth that is trees, plants, and sacrifice and the back round of how mankind is my picture that, god made the world and god made it more colorful so the earth didn't stay empty.

Liyana



[illegible]

25

Happiness and Tolerance

With buildings as
my hands I will soil and grow,
Their beauty radiating out like
sunlight, moonlight, church, and more.
All here, all a sight to behold.

Their gardens, both inside and out,
Fill up with a sense of devotion.
The intricate details etched in stone,
A testament to the builder's skill shown.

Each one an oasis of peace and calm,
A sanctuary from the world's storm.
A reminder of faith's promise.

For centuries, they've stood the test of time,
Enduring war, weather, and human crime.

As symbols of hope, love and grace,

My buildings continue to road their place.


May they inspire and guide us all,

As we journey through life's rise and fall,

And walk in the path of love and grace.

WINNER

26



WINNER

Maryam and Tahsin



Morpeth School

Key Stage 3

This poem links to the theme sacred space and Holy buildings as it says how they stand tall and how important they are to people. It also mentions Holy buildings surviving human crimes and weather. This poem shows how Holy buildings affect people as it calls Holy buildings a symbol of hope and grace. Holy buildings can represent people's religion and who they are. Me and my friend, Tahsin, decided to write a poem and draw a picture because mosques are a symbol of peace and hope for us.

Ishta: Central Foundation Girls' School
All God's Creatures Key Stage 3

In this place of artwork, I have portrayed a simple girl who is connecting with god's creatures around her, also being one of God's creatures herself and how she is one with the earth as can be seen through the dirt on her face and the roses/leaves in her hair.



RUNNER
UP

29

my project links to the theme "What is food today?"
my project links to this because, put in the
people's love and the places that food would
be. (Food is everywhere)

- Toni - Renae

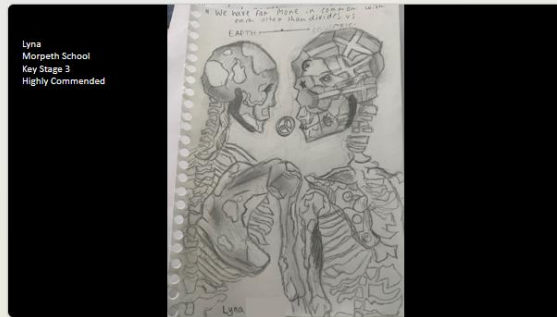
Toni-Renae - Morpeth School KS3
Highly Commended

30

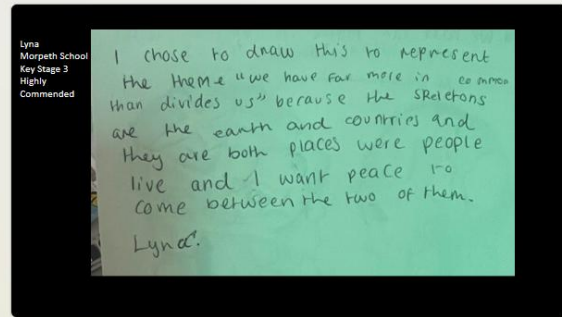
Amani
Key Stage Three
Morpetts School
Highly Commended

I painted and drew this piece as I believe that if we spend time much less money, about it we different as that one then we wouldn't be able to meet amazing people because we would be too busy looking for things so that, divide we then will be since be open. So people of us are constantly picking out the difference?

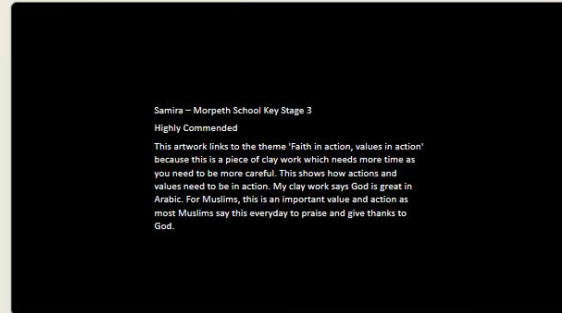
By Amani



33



34



Appendix B: Data analysis for RE in Tower Hamlets

School name	Religious character	School type	% year 7 hours - RE	% year 8 hours - RE	% year 9 hours - RE	% year 10 hours - RE	% year 11 hours - RE	% year 12 hours - RE	% year 13 hours - RE	% hours - RE	KS4FCEntriesPerc	KS4SCEntries	KS4AllEntriesPerc	NoEntriesPerc	OfstedRating	Percentage9-4FC	Percentage9-4SC	SecondaryPremium
Bow School	No	LA	1.63	0	0	41.85		0	0	5.08	97.4	0	97.4	2.6	Good	47.6		Medium
Langdon Park Community School	No	LA	6.72	6.92	5.66	2.92	5.47	0	0	4.44	86.2	0	86.2	13.8	Good	65.3		High
Morpeth School	No	LA	3.05	2.7	11.99	11.53	0	3.08	2.65	3.37	96.6	0	96.6	3.4	Good	74.3		High
Mulberry School for Girls	No	Academies	3.54	3.65	7.21	6.69	6.56	4.06	4.3	5.23	100	0	100	0	Outstandir	84.5		Medium
Stepney Green Mathematics and Computing College	No	Academies	2.48	5.14	4.56	5.94	5.84	2.04	2.35	4.03	98.9	0	98.9	1.1	Good	62.7		Medium
St Paul's Way Trust School	No	Academies	5.12	5.53	10.44	10.93	0	3.26	5.41	5.91	95.3	3	98.3	1.7	Outstandir	85.3	14.3	
Oaklands School	No	LA	3.64	3.48	3.4	7.09	6.49	0	0	4.08	27	0	27	73	Good	62.2		High
Swanlea School	No	LA	3.28	3.11	8.7	9.46	0	4.23	3.23	4.64	98	0	98	2	Outstandir	89.1		High
George Green's School	No	LA	3.28	3.26	7.28	6.32	5.11	0	0	3.93	95.1	0	95.1	4.9	Good	61.9		High
Central Foundation Girls' School	No	LA	3.29	3.29	3.77	6.57	6.24	2.62	3.17	4.32	99.2	0	99.2	0.8	Good	83.9		High
Stepney All Saints Church of England Secondary School	CE	LA	3.37	6.36	6.62	6.56	6.75	2.95	2.92	5.21	99.5	0	99.5	0.5	Outstandir	82.4		Medium
Bishop Challoner Catholic School	RC	LA	10.61	10.87	8.53	9.46	10.06	4.5	3.66	8.63	99.2	0	99.2	0.8	Good	61.5		Medium
Wapping High School	No	Free Schools									24.7	0	24.7	75.3	Good	75		Medium
London Enterprise Academy	No	Free Schools	4.94	4.64	4.94	10.91	6.58			6.71	100	0	100	0	Requires ir	57.8		
St Paul's Way Trust School	No	Academies	5.12	5.53	10.44	10.93	0	3.26	5.41	5.91	95.3	3	98.3	1.7	Good	85.3	14.3	
Mulberry School for Girls	No	Academies	3.54	3.65	7.21	6.69	6.56	4.06	4.3	5.23	100	0	100	0	Outstandir	84.5		Medium
Mulberry Stepney Green Mathematics and Computing	No	Academies	2.48	5.14	4.56	5.94	5.84	2.04	2.35	4.03	98.9	0	98.9	1.1	Good	62.7		Medium
Mulberry UTC	No	Free Schools				7.15	3.46	0	0	1.65	56	0	56	44	Good	85.7		High

SACRE request that Tower Hamlets Education Partnership include these points in conversations with the following schools about this data:

- Congratulations to the following schools for achieving GCSE results above the National Average: Morpeth, Mulberry School for Girls, St Paul's Way, Swanlea, Central Foundation, Stepney All Saints, St Paul's Way, Wapping High School and Mulberry UTC
- Bow School, Morpeth, St Paul's Way re: no reported provision in year 11
- Wapping High School re: Error in reporting the workforce data, evident by the fact that the school is making entries for GCSE
- Oaklands re small number of GCSE entries noting that all pupils must follow an examination course in RE in years 10 and 11 (Agreed Syllabus requirement)