

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education



SACRE Annual Report 2024-25

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Waltham Forest SACRE is a member of the National Association of SACRES

1. Introduction

1.1. Preface by the Chair

The year started with a summer of challenges for many communities across the UK with the outbreak of disorder aimed at new migrants to our country. It was pleasing to witness the response of the people of Walthamstow who turned out to show solidarity with the minority groups who are part of our diverse and welcoming community.

This event underlined the importance of high-quality Religious Education in our schools. Not only to advance the intellectual and personal development of our students but also to develop an understanding of our neighbours and how we can all live together and prosper in fellowship.

Our current Agreed Syllabus was introduced in September 2021. The local authority is required to establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference to review and upgrade the syllabus every 5 years. Preparation for the review has been a key focus of our work this year. In October we organised a very successful Conference for Teachers to start the process of consultation. Our view was that the voice of teachers should be strong in the process. The conference was followed by establishing RE teacher working parties to start the review. Due to the difficulty of completing the process by 2026 and any complications to the process that might arise from the DfE review of the curriculum that is currently under way nationally, we have advised the local authority to extend the contract for the current Agreed Syllabus by a further year.

We were most grateful to the management of the Faizan-e-Islam Mosque who kindly hosted our meeting in July.

Special thanks are due to Is'Haaq Jasat and Julia Diamond-Conway for their excellent work in organising our conference for teachers.

As always, I need to add my thanks and admiration to the members of SACRE for the time and energy that they have given to our work. I am particularly grateful for the support of Ruth Kaufman, Vice Chair, throughout the year.

Colin Whitehead, Chair SACRE

1.2. The local context

The community of the London Borough of Waltham Forest is culturally and socially diverse. Many people have travelled across the globe to come and make their home among us. This diversity is celebrated in the schools, shops, restaurants, businesses, places of worship and institutions throughout the borough.

Religious affiliation in Waltham Forest % of pop. ¹		
Religion	2011	2021
Buddhist	0.8	0.7
Christian	48.4	39.0
Hindu	2.3	1.9
Jewish	0.5	0.5
Muslim	21.9	21.6
Sikh	0.5	0.5
No Religion	18.0	27.9
Religion Other	0.4	1.0
Religion not stated	7.3	7.0

The 2021 census shows some changes in the borough over the last 10 years, The most marked are: an increase in those identifying as “No religion” and a decrease in those identifying as “Christian”.

Our school population records pupils coming from over 150 different language backgrounds. This diversity is also reflected in the faiths and beliefs of our community, as well as in the varied cultural traditions of those who identify as followers within the major religious groups.

The borough is served by:

- 53 primary schools (30 maintained, 21 academies. 2 free schools)
- 17 secondary schools (8 maintained, 8 academies. 1 free schools)
- 2 6th form colleges
- 3 nursery schools (maintained)
- 4 special schools (1 maintained, 3 academies)

Of these schools 11 are schools with a religious character (8 primary & 3 secondary)

1.3. Key priorities for action in 2024-25

The key priorities for action were agreed as:

- use the established Teacher Network meetings to support the:
 - Review and evaluation of the Agreed Syllabus
 - Subject knowledge of RE teachers
- Promote the Schools’ Linking project
- Review of SACRE impact and effectiveness

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics

2. Religious Education

2.1. Locally Agreed Syllabus

The current agreed syllabus was implemented in September 2021 and is due to be reviewed at the start of 2026/27.

SACRE have advised the local authority to:

- Convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference in Autumn Term 2025.
- Extend the contract for the current Agreed Syllabus by a further year to the start of 2027/28 due to the difficulty of completing the process by 2026 and the possible need to absorb recommendations that might arise from the DfE review of the curriculum.

The process of starting the review of the syllabus has been facilitated by:

2.1.1. Teacher Syllabus Review Working Groups:

At our “RE Futures” conference in October (see para 2.3.1) 23 teachers from our schools signed up to join working groups to review the syllabus.

The first working group was held in February. The focus of this meeting was to review the Waltham Forest Agreed Syllabus. The very successful parts of the syllabus that were meeting the needs of local students were identified as well as those parts of the syllabus that seemed less relevant or failed to work in our schools. Some colleagues were also able to identify some gaps in the current syllabus that might be worth filling in future. The session was both useful and enjoyed by those taking part.

The second working party of the year was held in the Summer Term. Teachers and other participants had the opportunity to examine and analyse a range of syllabuses regularly used in other London boroughs. The examples looked at included those adopted by Haringey (“Awareness, Mystery and Value”), “Living Difference” used in several inner London boroughs, as well as those from London Borough of Newham and, because of a very different approach, that from Norfolk.

Whilst participants were familiar enough with the Waltham Forest syllabus the challenge looking at examples from other areas introduced ideas and approaches that could be adopted within a new syllabus for us. Participants were able to put together a ‘wish list’ for a possible revised syllabus by the end of the

session. This can be seen alongside the features particularly valued in the current Waltham Forest syllabus, along with the best of current practice. SACRE is very grateful to the schools and teachers for giving up their time to do this work. We were able to use part of the SACRE budget to grant the schools able to release teachers for each of the half-day sessions £100 towards the cost of supply cover.

2.2. Standards in RE

2.2.1. KS 4 GCSE Religious Studies:

In 2024 1562 pupils sat for GCSE Religious Studies out of a total of 2943 students in the borough (53%). This represents a slightly higher proportion of students taking the exam than in 2023.

It is pleasing to report that for the first time in a number of years every school in the borough was able to give at least some students the opportunity to sit for this exam. The proportion of students entered by each school continues to vary greatly. As last year, 8 schools entered 90% or more of their students into the exam, though over half enter less than 40% of their students, with 4 schools entering less than 2% of their cohort.

In general, the borough average grade for students that were entered for either AQA religious studies A or Eduqas Religious Studies papers was higher than the national. In all Exam boards, girls achieved higher average scores than boys. Congratulations are due to the following schools: Leytonstone School, Norlington School for Boys, Eden School for Girls. These schools achieved both higher than national average scores and entered more than 90% of their students.

In addition to offering the full GCSE, Buxton School also offered the short course to a minority of students.

Confirmed results for 2023/24 cohort (see **Appendix B**)

2.2.2. KS5 A level Religious Studies:

At A level 4 institutions entered students this year, as against 3 in 2023.

Although the total number of students sitting the exam fell from 29 (2023) to 25 (2024), a higher proportion of students in the borough achieved the top grades in 2024.

Confirmed A level results for 2023/24 (see **Appendix B**)

2.2.3. What did OFSTED say about RE in Waltham Forest?

During the year Ofsted visited 15 schools in Waltham Forest, 10 primary schools, 5 secondary schools and 1 special school.

Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 are no longer given an overall effectiveness grade. Ofsted now grades schools for the following key judgements: quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management and for any relevant provision judgement (e.g. early years). Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website.

School inspections include "deep dives" into specific subject areas.

Unfortunately, no "deep dives" into religious education were included in any of the inspections carried out in the borough last year. A single comment in one report highlights the importance of pupils having first-hand experience.

"...pupils have also visited places of worship, including a gurdwara, a synagogue and a mosque." Chapel End Junior Academy

2.3. Support for Teaching & Learning

2.3.1. Teachers RE Conference – October 2024

A very successful conference open to all teachers was held on 15th October 2024. The '**RE Futures Conference**' was organised by Adviser Julia Diamond-Conway and Is'Haaq Jasat, SACRE member and Head of RE at Eden Girls Waltham Forest.

50+ primary and secondary RE teachers and RE leads attended from schools across the borough. The conference was well received by all who attended. There were a variety of networking sessions, team activities and meaningful presentations by keynote speakers.

Jan Hayes was our keynote speaker, who is a renowned RE specialist from Manchester. She shared some valuable insights into the key ingredients of what makes an RE teacher outstanding, the components required for a coherent RE syllabus and the importance of continuously pursuing development and CPD training opportunities as RE specialists



Is'Haaq Jasat delivered an inspiring workshop on how to teach Islam with confidence. This was followed by Julia Diamond-Conway delivering an insightful session on ways to develop personal knowledge in RE.

Julia facilitated discussions centred on reviewing the current syllabus and exploring the way forward for getting a new version in place. As a result, some 20 teachers expressed an interest in actively participating in the process.

Feedback from the attendees was very positive.

Special thanks are due to Eden School for their generosity in hosting this event. The work of Is'Haaq Jasat and his colleagues in organising the venue, catering and the warmth of welcome were appreciated by all.

2.3.2. RE Teacher Network Meetings hosted by Julia Diamond-Conway (Advisor to SACRE)

This year, the Spring Term network meetings were held separately. Primary colleagues worked on how to teach RE creatively. Secondary teachers had a

session focusing on effective preparation for GCSE looking for the key elements for helping students to achieve well.

The Summer Term meeting was held jointly with an opportunity to network at the start followed by a move into breakout rooms for different phases.

2.4. Complaints about RE

SACRE has a role in investigating complaints against schools in relation to RE and Collective Worship. In 2024-25 there were no such formal complaints reported.

2.5. Withdrawal from RE

Currently we do not have data to indicate the number of students that have been formally withdrawn from RE lessons.

3. Collective Worship

3.1. Guidance to schools

The SACRE guidance to schools for Collective Worship was updated in January 2024 and can be seen here:

<https://thehub-beta.walthamforest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Collective-Worship-Guidance-for-Schools2024.pdf>

3.2. Determinations

SACRE has a statutory role in considering and granting determinations under The Education Reform Act of 1988. No such requests were made this year. The Adviser to SACRE is always available to assist Headteachers in respect of any request.

4. Other local issues

4.1. Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a standard item on all our agenda. All members are now familiar with the duties as set out in “Keeping Children safe in Education”².

²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/954314/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2020_-_Update_-_January_2021.pdf

4.2. Survey of schools

The SACRE survey of schools in the summer term 2025 focused on the training needs for the RE workforce. Unfortunately, a very low rate of respondents meant that we did not achieve the quality of data we were looking for. In future years we should consider the timing and format of the survey to enable a better rate of response.

For those schools submitting returns we can say that training sessions during the working day are by far the most popular, followed by twilight and webinar sessions.

It was unclear how effective the support for primary ECT teachers to teach RE is. Likewise, the survey was unable to determine the needs of secondary teachers of RE who are trained to teach other subjects.

To complete this survey in future there should be separate primary/secondary versions to adequately meet the need to secure useful data.

5. Advice given by SACRE to the local authority

5.1. Action on SACRE membership

The current representation of group A on SACRE does not adequately reflect the range of faiths and beliefs within the borough, and the local authority should recruit additional SACRE members from other specified faiths and beliefs.

5.2. Alert to schools

The local authority should inform all borough secondary schools of the issue arising from the use of an outdated and withdrawn RE textbook that may still be in use and also still available to students online.

5.3. Action on Agreed Syllabus Conference

The current Agreed Syllabus is reaching the end of the 5-year review cycle. The local authority should convene an ASC in Autumn Term 2025 to start the process.

5.4. Extend syllabus current contract

Given the timescale for the LA to formally adopt a new syllabus and the possibility that the process may need to consider possible recommendations from the DfE curriculum review, the LA should extend the current Syllabus contract with RE Today to September 2027.

5.5 Response from LA The LA accepted all the advice, although SACRE recognises it continues to be challenging to recruit new members to group A.

6. Organization of SACRE

6.1. Meetings and attendance

The SACRE had a programme of 5 meetings across the year: 4 meetings were conducted via Zoom. The July meeting was held in person at a local Mosque.

Date of meeting	Quorate	no. attended	Apologies received
25 th September	Meeting cancelled due to no. of apologies		
26 th November 2024	Yes	11	3
25 th February 2025	Yes	8	4
15 th May 2025	Yes	6	4
9 th July 2025	Yes	7	4

6.2. SACRE effectiveness

Each year the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) publishes a Self-Review Toolkit to enable SACREs to review their practice under various headings. Assessments are made against benchmarks for us to determine the category that best describes our progress: “requires improvement”, “developing”, “established” or “advanced”. The SACRE spent time at the February meeting discussing our judgement against the criteria within the heading “**Section 3: The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus**”.

Key areas covered included: how SACRE reviews the success of the existing locally agreed syllabus; how well does the locally agreed syllabus promote effective learning and teaching in RE, and is it fit for purpose; launching and implementing the Agreed Syllabus; membership and training of the Agreed Syllabus Conference; developing the revised agreed syllabus; and making best use of national guidance.

Waltham Forest has a bought-in syllabus from a respected national provider; funds support from an expert RE adviser and provides reliable administrative support. SACRE is also provided with a small amount of funds that can be used to support teacher meetings etc. However, it works to a tight budget and with a smaller membership than it would like. As might be expected against that background, our assessment was mostly 'established' with some 'developing'.

The key actions to carry forward for the rest of 2024/5 and into the coming year are to continue to develop our connections with schools and teachers: collecting teacher views, building a picture of strengths and weaknesses of the current syllabus, setting out clear expectations of the LA and school leadership, and engaging teachers as far as possible with the design and launch of the next Agreed Syllabus. We will also need to spend time recruiting, and designing a training process for, the Agreed Syllabus Conference; as well as making sure that it makes best use of national documentation such as the Non-Statutory National Framework in RE, the report of the Commission on RE, and Ofsted advice on RE. Elsewhere in this report, the feedback on the teachers' meetings held in spring and summer 2024/5 show how we are taking this agenda forward.

6.3. Professional and administrative support

SACRE has enjoyed excellent professional support from our advisor Julia Diamond-Conway employed by contract from RE Today. Excellent admin support is provided by Waltham Forest Governor Services. All meetings have been effectively clerked, and minutes produced in a timely fashion.

All our meetings have been attended by Assistant Director of Learning up to the Spring Term. Since then, meetings gain other support via contact with the Director of Children's Services

6.4. Membership

During the year SACRE has endeavoured to increase the representation in Groups A, B and C.

It is noted that in Group A there is not currently a representative from the Sikh faith or representatives from the wider Christian communities in the borough.

The number of vacancies in Groups B and C remains a concern.

A list of members and representation as of July 2025 is attached in **Appendix A**

6.5. Finance

Expenditure: financial year April 1st 2024 – March 31st 2025

Item	cost
Advisor contract (REToday)	£10,000
Governor Services	£5,780
Officer support (Dir. Children's Services Recharge)	£4,282
NASACRE Membership	£175
The Hub	£1,129
Conference bookings (NASACRE)	£220
Teacher conference "RE Futures"	£1725
Teacher release contribution – Syllabus work group	£1,500
Total	£24,811

6.6. Who receives this report

This report will be distributed to:

- Director of Children's Services
- Members of the Education Scrutiny Sub Committee
- Headteachers of schools and colleges in Waltham Forest
- Chairs of governors and Academy Trusts
- NASACRE

The SACRE clerk will send a copy of the SACRE report to the Department for Education: ministers@education.gov.uk

The report will also be emailed to NASACRE for publication on its website:

SACRE reports: admin@nasacre.org.uk

If you have any comments about this report, please contact

Waltham Forest Governor Services:

governor.services@walthamforest.gov.uk

Appendix A

MEMBERSHIP OF WALTHAM FOREST SACRE ~ July 2023

Group A	Other Christian denominations and other faiths represented in Waltham Forest		
	Jasmine Danish	Bah'ai	13/12/25
	Keith Pilling	Buddhism	10/05/27
	Tara Khare	Hinduism	10/05/27
	Jamal Mannan	Islam	04/07/25
	Ruquyya Vankad	Islam	04/07/25
	Paul Braham	Judaism	10/07/26
	Ruth Kaufman	Humanist non-faith	09/05/27
Group B	The Church of England: Appointed by the Diocese of Chelmsford Education Committee with the Synod of the Waltham Forest Deanery.		
4 members	Ms Ruth Everett		17/10/25
Group C	The Teachers and Educators of the borough		
12 members	Ms Heather Soar	Primary	10/10/25
	Mr Is'Haaq Jasat	Secondary	07/07/28
	Ms Rukhsana Yaqoob	Secondary	05/06/26
	Mr Colin Whitehead	Sch. governor	20/03/26
	Ms Katy Youngman	Primary	30/11/26
Group D	The London Borough of Waltham Forest and the community		
	Cllr Richard Sweden	Elected Member	24/05/26
	Cllr Yusuf Patel	Elected Member	24/05/26
	Cllr Emma Best	Elected Member	24/05/26
	Cllr Kisha Green	Elected Member	24/05/26
	Ms Mary Jarrett	LBWF Director – Schools	
Others attending - non-voting			
	Ms Julia Diamond-Conway	RE Advisor to WF SACRE	
	Annette Reidy	SACRE Administrator	

Appendix B

GCSE KS4 Waltham Forest KS4 cohort 2024						
Full Course	No. on roll	No. of entries	% of entry	School Av. Pts	difference to Nat av	
AQA GCSE Religious Studies A	Nat. av. Pt score 5 (LA 5.1)				F/M +0.9	
Belmont Park School	10	9	90%	0.3	-4.7	
Buxton School	142	2	1%	4	-1	
Chingford Foundation School	248	241	97%	4.4	-0.6	
Eden Girls' School, Waltham Forest	124	120	97%	5.9	0.9	
Frederick Bremer School	176	30	17%	4.9	-0.1	
George Mitchell School	120	1	1%	6	1	
Heathcote School & Science College	194	1	1%	0	-5	
Lammas School	141	47	33%	3.9	-1.1	
Leytonstone School	198	193	97%	5.2	0.2	
Norlington School and 6th Form	135	127	94%	5.7	0.7	
Walthamstow Academy	168	161	96%	6	1	
Eduqas GCSE in Religious Studies	Nat. av. Pt score 4.9 (LA 5.3)				F/M +0.8	
Willowfield School	168	84	50%	5.3	0.4	
AQA GCSE Religious Studies B	Nat. av. Pt score 5.2 (LA 0)					
Lammas School	141	1	1%	0	-5.2	
Pearson GCSE Religious Studies B	Nat. av. Pt score 5.1 (LA 5)				F/M +0.8	
Connaught School for Girls	118	115	97%	4.9	-0.2	
George Mitchell School	58	20	34%	5.1	0	
Highams Park School	111	18	16%	5.3	0.2	
Kelmscott School	61	27	44%	4.6	-0.5	
South Chingford Foundation School	48	15	31%	3	-2.1	
Walthamstow School for Girls	179	72	40%	6	0.9	
Pearson GCSE Religious Studies A	Nat. av. Pt score 4.9 (LA 4.2)				F/M +0.7	
Holy Family Catholic School	107	105	98%	4.2	-0.7	
Short Course	No. on roll	No. of entries	% of entry			
AQA Religious Studies short course						
Buxton School	142	10	7%	n/a	n/a	

Religious Studies (4610) / Exam: GCE A level 2024

School/College	NOE	A*-A	A*-B	A*-E	Avg Pts
National (all entries)	15220	26.0	54.5	97.4	35.3
Chingford Foundation School	3	-	33.3	100.0	30.0
Leyton Sixth Form College	13	30.8	46.2	100.0	35.4
Norlington School and 6th Form	5	40.0	80.0	100.0	42.0
Sir George Monoux College	3	-	-	100.0	20.0