

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 24 March 2022

By: The Chair 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 People Scrutiny 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 schools and academies.

1 Background

1.1 Since 1988 Local Authorities have had a statutory duty to establish a Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). Further information about East Sussex SACRE is available on the ESCC website [here](#).

The duties of SACRE

1.2 It is the duty of SACRE to advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters relating to religious education (RE), collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

1.3 It is the duty of the LA to provide a locally agreed syllabus for religious education which must be reviewed every five years. Religious education is a statutory element of the curriculum for all pupils which is determined locally. Academies are not obliged to follow the agreed syllabus but must provide religious education that is compliant with legislation.

1.4 The Education Act 1996 requires SACRE each year to publish a report on the work of the board and standards in its schools and the actions taken during the year.

Annual Update Overview

1.5 This has again been a frustrating year since the continuing pandemic has meant that students could not progress with GCSEs seamlessly and visits to schools have been out of the question. However, we have used the opportunity to make speedy progress on revising our Local Agreed Syllabus and agreeing the way forward, and details of our work on this will be included later in this report.

1.6 Our Schools Working Group and our two hubs for Primary and Secondary Schools have worked extremely well and the online activity has meant a much wider attendance and more helpful interaction, collaboration and problem solving.

1.7 SACRE have met regularly both online and in person, when legally possible, to conduct business and ensure we maintain the positive momentum and support schools in meeting their statutory provision and aiming for high quality religious education in all key stages.

2 Statutory Responsibilities

2.1 The key activity in relation to SACRE's statutory responsibilities for this year has been to establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference in order to undertake a review of the current syllabus and plan for the new syllabus. The Agreed Syllabus Conference has met twice under the chairmanship of the Executive Head Teacher of Rye College and Rye Community Primary School.

2.2 Initially feedback on the existing syllabus was sought which demonstrated that it was no longer fit for purpose and a completely new syllabus would be required. Extensive consultation and consideration was given to the needs and ambitions of all stakeholders. We have consulted parents, teachers, pupils and major faith groups about both the existing syllabus and what might be needed in any new syllabus. Schools, in particular wanted a syllabus that was relevant to life in East Sussex and the world in the 21st century, that reflected the diversity of beliefs and faiths and what it means to live a life of faith in today's society.

2.3 The Agreed Syllabus Conference explored options for developing a syllabus from within our own resources or working in partnership with other local authorities and SACREs or with a wider organisation. Following presentations from potential partners the Agreed Syllabus Conference has been working with a national organisation, RE Today, who support SACREs and promote high quality RE in this country and internationally.

2.4 A new syllabus, 'Faith and Belief in the 21st Century – The Agreed Syllabus for RE for East Sussex,' was formally adopted by the Agreed Syllabus Conference on January 5th 2022. The new syllabus includes learning related to the major world religions but also allows for the exploration of wider world views and thematic, moral and ethical questions. A working group of secondary teachers working with the support of a specialist adviser from RE Today have also developed a core curriculum for key stage 4 which can work alongside more formal qualifications. The new syllabus is linked to the Ofsted framework and has a clarity of teaching, planning and assessment guidance. It is supported by detailed schemes of work for those schools that wish to purchase them.

2.5 The syllabus is under license for five years for all schools and academies in East Sussex and it is hoped that they will all wish to engage with this exciting development. The licensing costs are being paid for from the SACRE budget in full across two financial years, and SACRE is also supporting the training and professional development for the new syllabus. A launch event is planned for 29th March 2022 followed by more detailed training with a view to full implementation from September 2022.

2.6 Monitoring activity, which often includes visits to schools, has been significantly curtailed again this year but we have had excellent engagement from schools in both the primary and secondary network meetings which have taken place online three times a year. This has been the main source of CPD (continuing professional development) and SACRE has been able to respond to training needs identified by schools through these network meetings. On average we have had around 12 secondary schools represented at the secondary networks and, on occasion, in excess of 60 schools represented at the primary meetings; one event had over 100 participants online. Reports are made to SACRE by the network leads which demonstrate the value put on RE as a subject by the majority of the schools and the ambition to ensure that the quality of teaching continues to develop and improve.

2.7 There have been no formal exam results locally or nationally to enable SACRE to evaluate pupil outcomes at key stages 4 or 5.

2.8 Briefings for schools have also included sharing the May 2021 Research Report produced by Ofsted which details what makes for high quality religious education. SACRE has also shared some of the latest research and findings from higher education and the RE Council around world views and how that impacts on RE in schools.

3 Collective Worship

3.1 It is the responsibility of SACRE to monitor the statutory responsibility of schools to hold opportunities for collective worship. It has been incredibly challenging for schools to hold assemblies

during the pandemic but SACRE has had examples of schools holding class assemblies, in bubbles, and online assemblies in order to maintain this important community and social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) dimension to school life.

3.2 To SACRE's knowledge no parents have made an application to exercise their right of withdrawal from RE lessons or collective worship and no school has made an application for a determination around the requirement that collective worship is mainly Christian in nature.

4 Links with National Bodies

4.1 East Sussex SACRE continues to keep in touch with national events and views. The Chair is a member of the NASACRE (National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education) Executive and plays an active part in their deliberations. The Chair has also been co-opted to the Governance Committee of the Religious Education Council.

4.2 SACRE members keep in touch through NASACRE's termly briefings and attendance at the regular national online training sessions as well as receiving reports back from the Chair around national issues.

4.3 Two thirds of SACRE members have taken part in online training for new members and webinars for members on key topics, such as world views, and some have also attended the annual NASACRE Conference, all of which have been held online. The Adviser to SACRE also attends the South-Central meetings of SACREs to learn from practice in the region.

5 Other areas of work

5.1 During 2021/22 SACRE has carried out training for School Governors, covering the role of SACRE, the role of governors in monitoring RE and collective worship. It has also been an opportunity to both consult with governors and update them on key questions about high quality RE and the emerging new Agreed Syllabus. The following numbers attended over the 4 sessions: 23 Sept – 26; 24 Sept – 29; 22 Feb – 13; 25 Feb – 24. The feedback evaluated them as 100% good and better.

6 SACRE Membership and arrangements

6.1 Representatives of the Church of England Diocese of Chichester regularly attend SACRE meetings, as do those of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel. We have a reasonably wide representation across faiths and those of no faith. As well as the Christian denominations represented, we have Unitarian, Bahai, Jewish and Muslim members, although we would like to strengthen this voice. We have sought Buddhist support but have not been able to sustain this. We have a Humanist observer.

6.2 Meetings in 2021 were all held via MS Teams with an attendance rate as follows:

16 March 2021

Attendance 84%

22 June 2021

Attendance 89%

23 November 2021

Attendance 79%

All meetings were quorate.

6.3 Agenda items for all meetings included feedback on Network meetings of both Primary and Secondary schools. Each meeting had a Budget update. The Development Plan was updated at the November meeting and will be further updated in March this year. Regular feedback was given at each meeting regarding the progress of the review of the RE Syllabus. All meetings now have a standing item on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

6.4 The constitution for SACRE is being updated and reviewed at the March 2022 meeting to ensure that it is fully up to date and accurately reflects both the work of SACRE and how SACRE discharges its duties.

6.5 SACRE has had a budget of £15,000 for this financial year and this has been used to ensure that specialist advice and support is in place to support SACRE with carrying out its duties. It has also funded the review and development of the new agreed syllabus and has paid in part for the licensing arrangements and the partnership with RE Today. It has also supported some SLE (specialist leader of education) school to school support, the local networks and online training for RE leaders in schools. Children's Services have supported SACRE through the provision of high-quality clerking and a children's services representative to work with the board. It is essential for this level of funding to continue over the next three years, at least, to ensure that engagement of schools, support for the new syllabus and high-quality advice for both SACRE and schools is able to continue to build capacity for high quality teaching and to ensure all schools and academies are supported in delivering their statutory requirements in relation to this area of the curriculum and school life.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an annual report and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council.

3.2 The People Scrutiny Committee is asked to support SACRE in its ongoing work to seek improvements to Religious Education provision.

Councillor Roy Galley
Chair of SACRE