

Bexley Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Annual Report for the academic year 2017-2018



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on Religious Education (SACRE)

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CONTENTS

Section 1: Introduction from The Chairman

Section 2: Advice to Statutory Bodies

Our schools
Our profile
Agreed Syllabus
SMSC
Training
Newsletter
Teaching resources

Section 3: Standards and Quality of Provision of RE

Provision of RE in schools
Religious Studies examinations in Bexley
Complaints

Section 4: Agreed Syllabus

The Bexley Agreed Syllabus
Our next review

Section 5: Collective Worship

Collective Worship in Bexley
Determination and complaints

Section 6: Management of SACRE

Professional and administrative support
Development of the SACRE and SACRE training
Finance
Membership and Constitution
NASACRE Code of Conduct

Section 7: SACRE in the wider community

Our activities
Community cohesion
Consultations and correspondence
Equality

Section 8: Summary

1. INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to be able to introduce the Bexley SACRE Annual Report for the academic year 2017 / 2018.

This is the first Annual Report produced in my tenure as the newly elected Chairman, and I must open by expressing my thanks and gratitude to the outgoing Chairman, Councillor David Leaf, for his excellent oversight of the SACRE in recent years, and for his helpful guidance in handing over the reins.

I start my time as Chairman at the beginning of a period that could see an exciting and encouraging change for RE and SACRE's, if the initial findings of the Commission on RE (CoRE) are confirmed. The final report is being published outside the timescale for this Annual Report, so more on that next year.

However, the SACRE broadly agreed with the CoRE initial findings, and with the publication of the final report, it will be time for the concerns raised by those involved in RE to be listened to and acted upon, before the continued demise of the subject becomes irreparable.

A review of the Bexley Agreed Syllabus is scheduled to commence in April 2019, so we may have to consider whether or not there are any implications for that arising from the CoRE recommendations. That said, the Syllabus is delivered to many of our schools and I would like to express my thanks to those involved in doing so: I am sure that it forms a key part of the spiritual and moral enrichment of young people.

It may be that the outcome of our review of RE provision in all Bexley's schools, which we planned in the period of this report, and started in the summer of 2018, will also determine how we approach the Agreed Syllabus review. Initial indications are that a high proportion of our schools are struggling to meet their legal requirements, both in the provision of RE and in making available statutory information about the subject. The final outcomes of the review may lead to further work to engage with schools and our leaders and teachers of RE.

I would like to thank our advisor, Virginia Corbyn, for our termly Newsletter to schools. The Newsletter plays its part in raising awareness of the SACRE and the resources available to our hard working teachers. Ms Corbyn also arranges twilight sessions for primary RE leaders and those attending have told me how useful and helpful they have found them to be. So my thanks to Ms Corbyn for her hard work in this regard too.

Unfortunately for the SACRE, Ms Corbyn decided to stand down from her role. Her expert guidance and advice will be sorely missed by SACRE Members, teachers and RE leaders, and I must place on record the immense thanks of so many who have been privileged to have benefited from her wise and thought-provoking advice. Thankfully, the SACRE will benefit from her continued presence at our meetings, albeit now in a different role in our Group B.

In the year in question we discussed the implications of the Government's intention to withdraw the Education Services Grant, and the need for the London Borough of

Bexley to be financially self-sufficient within two years. We welcomed our local authority's commitment to continued support, but there remain very real concerns for the ability of the SACRE to make a real difference in these financially challenging times. And, as our first self-assessment for six of years demonstrated, we do not appear to have made any progress.

In the year in question, the SACRE was delighted to be able to review some more excellent RE GCSE, AS and A level results achieved by Bexley students in 2017, albeit in a rather disjointed way thanks to the Government's late publication of the Short Course GCSE results. For 2018, once again I am delighted to be able to congratulate our teachers and students on some excellent results, all against a very challenging time for the subject. The SACRE shall be looking at examination results and trends in more detail later in 2018 – 19.

We continually have difficulties in recruiting, and retaining, members to our Group A which, with demographics and the make-up of our Borough changing, makes it more important to fully recruit to as we strive to ensure that we have balanced representation on SACRE. That said, newly formed links with a resurrected Bexley Interfaith Forum promptly filled a vacancy. We are finding too, that our very busy teachers do not appear able to fill a number of long-term vacancies in Group C.

Three quarters of our 83 schools now operate under Academy status, and this is having an impact on the influence the SACRE has. The relationship between schools and local authorities has changed, and although we are committed to working with our partners and primary and secondary providers to deliver high quality RE, it is not easy. There is a very real concern that our RE review will reveal that our influence is only effective in one quarter of our schools, if that.

Our previous Chairman said it last year, and I repeat it now - it is my hope that reviews of, and announcements about, RE may lead to some future stability for the subject, and for those that teach it. I hope that the DfE finally listen to, and act upon, the many issues facing this most important subject, and that a better future for the subject are not just an unrealistic aspiration.

I would like to close by thanking the SACRE members who have departed, and extend a warm welcome to our new members, and to thank them and Council officers for their contribution to the work of the SACRE.

Christine Catterall



Councillor Christine Catterall
Chairman of the Bexley SACRE

2. ADVICE TO STATUTORY BODIES

Our schools

With just over 80 schools in the London Borough of Bexley, three quarters being in the primary sector, our schools cover a wide range of governance categories, but the majority (more than 60) have now moved to academy status and, as a consequence, the SACRE's – and our local authority's - remit and potential for influence is somewhat limited.

We do try to ensure that every school is aware of their responsibilities and, where appropriate, ensure that those required to follow the Bexley Agreed Syllabus do so, and encourage others to have regard to it where no specific religious denomination or other syllabus applies.

Our profile

Notwithstanding the above we have in the past heard that some schools and teachers are not aware of the SACRE, or of its work. This was a concern and we commenced on some awareness-raising and local meetings and conferences for teachers.

The SACRE is aware that the termly Newsletter prepared by our adviser assists with raising our profile, and we are pleased to hear that the Boroughs RE subject leads and teachers are committed to RE. The Newsletter is now also issued to a wider audience to include school Governors.

However, with limited resources and an ever increasing number of academies, we are finding it difficult to promote the SACRE and its work over and above some general activities as explained above.

Agreed Syllabus

Feedback from teachers about the 2014 Agreed Syllabus continues to be positive and welcoming – see Section 4 of this Report. Since the Agreed Syllabus was launched, the SACRE has provided a support meeting every school term to help develop the knowledge, understanding and confidence of RE subject leaders in primary schools. We are pleased to hear that these support sessions are well received.

We are scheduled to commence a review the Agreed Syllabus in April 2019, and the planning for that is in the early development stage. Whether or not the recommendations arising from the Commission on RE, and any response thereto, will impact on our thinking remains to be seen.

SMSC

The SACRE is of the opinion that to complement RE in school, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development should be promoted, and as reported last year a very successful Bexley SMSC Conference was held.

A key element for delegates was to promote understanding of how to facilitate pupils' SMSC development as a central part of a school's ethos and values, and we hope that this has been taken back to our schools and implemented. Since the conference the SACRE has not had the resources to conduct follow up research or to contact delegates on whether anything learned has been put into practice.

Schools continue to be supported to network, collaborate and evaluate to then embed initiatives that successfully and consistently encourage their pupils to broaden their horizons.

Training

The London Borough of Bexley and our adviser held two free to attend networking events for RE subject leaders covering various topics, with one meeting focussing on, for example, more creative and engaging ways to record work. We find that these events provide an excellent opportunity to support the teaching of RE, particularly in the primary sector. It is normal practice for three meetings to be held each academic year, but one meeting had to be cancelled due to bad weather.

No training events for Governors have been held in the period of this report.

The SACRE is extremely grateful to the local authority staff, and our adviser, all of whom undertake a great deal of hard work to organise RE training and related events.

Newsletter

Through our adviser, the SACRE continues to produce a Newsletter every term. Designed to publicise local events, training opportunities and articles and provide details of teaching resources of help and interest to RE subject leaders and teachers, it is also intended to keep our schools informed about best practice. We are pleased to hear the regular and positive feedback from those who receive the Newsletter. The SACRE is grateful for the work that goes into the preparation of the Newsletter, and regards it as a valuable resource for our hard pressed RE teachers and subject leads.

Teaching resources

There is nothing specific to report this year, but the SACRE keeps this matter under review.

3. STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF PROVISION OF RE

Provision of RE in schools

A NASACRE case study about how to complain to schools over their (lack of) RE provision prompted discussion about provision in Bexley's schools, and highlighted the fact that the SACRE knew very little in this regard. Whilst the NASACRE approach was thought to offer a viable way forward, it was agreed that, in the first instance, some desk-based research should be carried out to ascertain data on RE provision.

There was also a recommendation from NASACRE to conduct a survey of schools about withdrawal from RE and Collective Worship. It was decided that this would not be pursued, at this stage, but the research would be expanded to cover Collective Worship.

The research therefore is to review RE provision in all our Borough's schools, the Ofsted requirement to publish the RE curriculum for all years groups, a statement about when and how Collective Worship would be conducted and to seek out statements about the option for parents to withdraw children from RE and Collective Worship. Once the research is complete, the SACRE will then determine what approach should be taken towards any school not meeting their statutory requirements in respect of RE and Collective Worship.

That research commenced towards the end of the academic year to which this Annual Report relates, and more details will be provided next time. The initial findings, however, are that for many schools the provision of relevant information is lacking.

We will be writing to all our schools about this, and will be conducting further research in 2019, all to be reported in our next Annual Report.

Against this background, it must be said that the SACRE is grateful for the work of our RE subject leaders and teachers in the Borough, against a national picture of teachers and schools struggling to meet their legal obligations.

Religious Studies examinations in Bexley

The SACRE continues to be proud of the results Bexley students achieve in their Religious Studies GCSE, AS and A Level examinations. But it should not be overlooked that good results would not be possible without the excellent teaching staff and RE subject leaders we have in the Borough, and the SACRE owes these dedicated people a debt of gratitude.

The Government released the 2018 Religious Studies examinations data late in January 2019, which is not helpful for the timely preparation and publication of a statutorily compliant Annual Report.

Last year we reported on the results achieved by students who sat a Religious Studies examination in Bexley in 2017. This year has presented another set of excellent results for the Borough's 2,000+ students who sat a Religious Studies

examination. The students, their teachers and RE Leaders should be congratulated. Summary tables of the results for Bexley, and a brief comparison with those for England, are set out at the end of this section. We will discuss these results in detail, and down to individual school level, in March 2019.

Whilst the change to the GCSE grading system renders some comparisons with earlier years less than meaningful, it is still possible to compare student examination entry numbers and overall pass rates. To this end, the number of GCSE Full Course entries differed by just three, although the decline of the Short Course is again evident. Pass levels for the GCSE were, unfortunately, lower than the previous year.

It is pleasing to see that AS Level entries were significantly higher than the previous year, with pass rates improving, and higher than the pass rate for England overall. The decoupling of the AS Level and A Level, meaning AS results will no longer count towards the A Level, do not appear to have had the effect in 2018 that the SACRE was anticipating: we will keep this under review, however. A Level entries were on a par with the previous year.

It is the SACRE's firm opinion that whilst there is an apparent national trend to marginalise and squeeze the provision of RE in schools, which is in part reflected locally as resources on Bexley schools diminish, it is nevertheless the case that our schools and RE teachers and subject leaders are managing to maintain an excellent level of education and first-class quality RE provision.

Complaints

In the period covered by this Report, there were no complaints made to the SACRE about RE or the provision thereof.

Religious Studies examination results: Bexley, 2007 – 2018
and comparisons with National (i.e. England) results
(2018 data is provisional)

GCSE Full Course	Entries	Passes A* - C	% Passes A* - C	All passes A* - G	% All passes A* - G
2007	730	510	69.9	723	99.0
2008	823	675	82.0	822	99.9
2009	1,010	746	73.4	994	98.4
2010	1,120	829	74.0	1,116	99.6
2011	1,625	1,161	71.4	1,609	99.0
2012	2,133	1,458	68.4	2,091	98.0
2013	1,977	1,481	74.9	1,953	98.8
2014	2,136	1,650	77.2	2,111	98.8
2015	2,062	1,635	79.3	2,031	98.5
2016	2,197	1,625	74.0	2,163	98.5
2017	1,975	1,533	77.3	1,960	98.5

	Entries	Passes 9 - 4	% Passes 9 - 4	All Passes 9 - 1	% All Passes 9 - 1
2018	1,781	1,295	72.7	1,745	97.8

In addition, in 2018 there were 191 students who took the GCSE Full Course in the 2017/18 academic year , but under the previous grading system.

GCSE Full Course	Entries	% Passes 9 - 4	% All Passes 9 - 1
Bexley	1,781	72.7	97.8
England	181,550	71.8	98.0

GCSE Short Course	Entries	Passes A* - C	% Passes A* - C	All passes A* - G	% All passes A* - G
2007	1,675	962	57.4	1,609	96.1
2008	1,554	932	60.0	1,525	98.1
2009	1,417	900	63.5	1,395	98.5
2010	1,631	892	54.7	1,590	97.5
2011	1,047	593	56.6	1,008	96.3
2012	536	299	55.8	510	95.1
2013	706	357	50.6	673	95.3
2014	437	178	40.7	395	90.4
2015	216	44	20.4	198	91.7
2016	3	1	33.3	3	100.0
2017	37	1	2.7	30	81.1

	Entries	Passes 9 - 4	% Passes 9 - 4	All Passes 9 - 1	% All Passes 9 - 1
2018	23	0	0.0	17	73.9

GCSE Short Course	Entries	% Passes 9 - 4	% All Passes 9 - 1
Bexley	23	0.0	73.9
England	5,530	58.8	95.5

AS Level	Entries	Passes A - B	% Passes A - B	All passes A - E	% All passes A - E
2009	108	41	38.0	89	82.4
2010	104	40	38.5	91	87.5
2011	98	32	32.7	89	90.8
2012	142	68	47.9	122	85.9
2013	140	52	37.1	121	86.4
2014	118	54	45.8	113	95.8
2015	226	97	42.9	212	93.8
2016	238	95	39.9	226	95.0
2017	60	10	16.7	47	78.3
2018	151	54	35.8	134	88.7

AS Level	Entries	% Passes A - B	% All Passes A - E
Bexley	151	35.8	88.7
England	15,870	35.5	86.5

A Level	Entries	Passes A* - B	% Passes A* - B	All passes A* - E	% All passes A* - E
2009	67	31	46.3	67	100.0
2010	58	34	58.6	57	98.3
2011	68	28	41.2	67	98.5
2012	61	28	45.9	56	91.8
2013	80	46	57.5	78	97.5
2014	82	47	57.3	80	97.6
2015	90	44	48.9	88	97.8
2016	148	79	53.4	148	100.0
2017	125	71	56.8	125	100.0
2018	113	51	45.1	108	95.6

A Level	Entries	% Passes A* - B	% All Passes A* - E
Bexley	113	45.1	95.6
England	16,560	52.1	97.9

4. AGREED SYLLABUS

The Bexley Agreed Syllabus

The current Agreed Syllabus was introduced in September 2014, and continues to be well received. And we hear that it is well established in schools that follow it.

The Agreed Syllabus includes an online resource, with the non-statutory elements predominantly web based and available via a number of media, such as Bexley Fronter etc. Teachers we have spoken to welcome this on line resource, and have noted that the SACRE is able to quickly and efficiently review the non-statutory elements, respond to feedback, and maintain and update the available material so that we can provide the best available resources to our schools.

With the Syllabus embedded in our schools, we are encouraging teachers to share their good practice.

In addition, the CRiBS organisation (Christian Resources in Bexley Schools) delivers some of the Agreed Syllabus modules in our schools and they say they have received excellent feedback.

We have a general idea about the number of schools that follow the Agreed Syllabus, but we are in the process of conducting some research to ascertain a more accurate picture. The results of the research may determine how we approach our next Agreed Syllabus review. The findings from the Commission on RE may also influence our thinking.

Our next review

We will start the process of undertaking the next full review of the Agreed Syllabus by the middle of April 2019. Initial discussions have taken place about this process, and there is some concern that, through changes in our membership, the SACRE has lost a great deal of the expertise and generous use of people's own time that was utilised to prepare the current Syllabus.

The SACRE has some concerns about the time and resources required to commit to producing a new Syllabus, and so an initial reaction has been to explore other options.

5. COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective Worship in Bexley

Following research and surveys as part of a review of Collective Worship in 2013, the SACRE concluded that provision of Collective Worship in the Borough's schools is adequate. The SACRE has not re-visited this, but anecdotal evidence suggests that Collective Worship continues to appear to be inclusive, varied and of benefit to students, and so the view reached in 2013 has not changed.

That said, our 2018 review of the information our schools provide on RE and Collective Worship (mentioned in section 3 of this report) includes the collation of some basic information on their websites, which has helped us ascertain which schools state when and how Collective Worship is conducted.

It is possible that the results of this review will lead us to a different opinion on not only the provision of Collective Worship in our schools, but also the quality, variety and inclusiveness thereof. As mentioned earlier, the initial findings, however, are that for many schools the provision of relevant information is lacking.

We will be writing to all our schools about this, and will be conducting further research in 2019, all to be reported in our next Annual Report.

Determination and complaints

For a number of years the SACRE has had a comprehensive determination framework that provides guidance on the procedures in the London Borough of Bexley for Head Teachers of schools wishing to seek a determination in respect of collective worship, or renewal or review of a previous determination. This framework has never been brought into use and, as might be expected, therefore, in the period of this report no determinations were applied for.

The SACRE did not receive any complaints about Collective Worship.

6. MANAGEMENT OF SACRE

Professional and administrative support

We expect a senior officer from the local authority's Strategic Education and Improvement Team to attend every meeting, and it is very disappointing that this has not always been the case in the period of this report. An officer of the Committee Services and Scrutiny Team of the local authority clerks the SACRE meetings and acts as the point of contact for individual members and external enquiries.

The SACRE had access to services provided by our RE Adviser, for up to 10 days a year, until July 2018: a new Adviser will be appointed as soon as possible.

Development of the SACRE and SACRE training

SACRE members are encouraged to attend national and regional events and to report back to subsequent SACRE meetings, but other than those organised by the local authority or the SACRE, no such events were attended in the period covered by this Report.

Any new members are provided with details of the work of the Bexley SACRE and are given copies of relevant National Association of SACRE literature.

We first conducted a self-assessment exercise in 2012, and in March 2018 we started the process once again. Using the National Association of SACREs toolkit we self-assessed against the "Standards and Quality of Provision of RE", and across the six sub-categories the assessment varied from "Established" to "Developing".

Across the piece, this likely represents a drop in standard from 2012. For the sub-categories where we now feel we are "Developing", the reasons were discussed and actions were proposed to improve. Our options are somewhat limited, though, given the academy status of many of our schools and poor responses to SACRE requests for information and opportunities to engage. Nevertheless, we are developing proposals for school engagement.

We will self-assess against the other categories, as and when we are able, when our newer members have their feet firmly under the table.

Finance

The SACRE receives no independent funding, although we are grateful to have access to a small allocation from the local authority's education budget should the need arise for a limited number of conference delegate fees, for example, and our NASACRE membership fee. The fee for the SACRE's Adviser is also paid from this budget.

At one of our meetings we discussed the implications of the Government's intention to remove the Education Services Grant, from which the SACREs funding is provided. We were pleased to hear that our local authority has options in place to help address the cost pressures arising as a result of the loss of their £1.6m ESG, although the final cost pressure is likely to be nearer £0.6m when other factors are taken into account. The SACRE welcomed the local authority's commitment to

continued support, but questioned how a new Agreed Syllabus might be funded, should a decision be taken in 2019 to completely overhaul the existing.

Membership and Constitution

Maintaining a strong membership is an ongoing concern for the SACRE.

Groups B is full to requirement which is positive, although there remain vacancies in Groups A and C, and it is these vacancies that are proving to be the most difficult to fill. With one or two exceptions, retention of members in these two Groups is proving difficult too: when a vacancy occurs, a number of local and national organisations are either unable to offer a nominee, or appearing unwilling to do so.

Fewer members means there is even more expectation on those that remain and who, we must not forget, give their time voluntarily.

In the lead up to local elections the SACRE conducts a membership review, and at the first meeting after the conclusion of that review a period of time is set aside for a more comprehensive introduction to SACREs and the work of the Bexley SACRE: this acts as an additional induction for new members and a refresher for existing members.

With local elections in Bexley in May 2018 our Chairman and Clerk reviewed membership in the early months of 2018, and changes were implemented in May and June. This is reflected by the number of changes seen in the membership listed later in this report. Our June 2018 meeting included some induction and refresh presentations.

The SACRE Constitution was last reviewed in 2010. Our Secretary is therefore conducting some research into other SACRE Constitutions and national guidelines, with a view to providing members with proposals for a refreshed Constitution, to be considered in the coming year, once our new members are settled in to their role.

Details of the SACRE membership and attendance at meetings during the period of this Report, are provided in the following three pages.

NASACRE Code of Conduct

We have adopted the NASACRE Code of Conduct, which will complement our Constitution.

The composition of the SACRE for the 2017/18 academic year was as follows:

GROUP A (CHRISTIAN AND OTHER FAITHS)

Baptist	Mr Mark Leveson	
Free Church (Evangelical Christians)	Mr Paul Weston	
Islam	Mrs Faozia Rashid	
Islam	Dr Faz Rashid	Since June '18
Methodist	Mrs Di Sprowles	
Sikh	Mr Kulvinder Singh	Since June '18
Buddhism	Vacancy	
Hinduism	Vacancy	
Judaism	Vacancy	
Roman Catholic	Vacancy	
Baptist	Mr Gordon Raggett	Until November '17

GROUP B (CHURCH OF ENGLAND)

Rev'd Alison Healy		Since July '18
Mrs Dorothy Jones	(Vice Chairman)	
Mrs Michelle Torrance		
Fr. Philip Wells		
Rev. Scott Lamb		Until June '18

GROUP C (TEACHERS IN THE AUTHORITY)

Mrs June Ben Rabah		
Mr Matthew Harris		Since June '18
Ms Cerys Siney		
Mrs Emily Champion		Until June '18
Mrs Judith Fudger		Until November '17
Ms Victoria O'Reilly		Until June '18
Ms Jaymie Pauvaday		Until June '18

GROUP D (THE AUTHORITY)

Councillor Esther Amaning		
Councillor Nigel Betts		Since May '18
Councillor Sybil Camsey		Since May '18
Councillor Christine Catterall	(Chairman)	
Councillor Sue Gower MBE		Since May '18
Councillor James Hunt		Since May '18
Councillor Howard Jackson		Since May '18
Councillor Wendy Perfect		Since May '18

Councillor Derry Begho		Until May '18
Councillor Ross Downing		Until May '18
Councillor Steven Hall		Until May '18
Councillor David Hurt		Until May '18
Councillor David Leaf		Until May '18

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

None

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (other than Councillor substitutes)

None

ADVISERS AND OFFICERS

Mrs Lauren Ovenden	Head of Education Partnership, Schools & Colleges	Since February '18
Ms Virginia Corbyn	Part-time Adviser	Until July '18
Ms Jo Lakey	Head of School Improvement	Until September '17

Attendance by members during the 2017/18 academic year was as follows:

	Possible	Apologies submitted	Absent	Attended
<u>Group A</u>				
Mr Mark Leveson*	3	0	0	3*
Mr Gordon Raggett	0	0	0	0
Mrs Faozia Rashid	3	0	0	3
Dr Faz Rashid	3	0	0	3**
Mr Kulvinder Singh	1	0	0	1
Mrs Di Sprowles	3	2	0	1
Mr Paul Weston	3	0	0	3

*two as a co-optee

**two as an observer/substitute

Group B

Rev'd Alison Healy	1	0	0	1
Mrs Dorothy Jones (Vice Chairman)	3	0	0	3
Rev. Scott Lamb	3	2	1	0
Mrs Michelle Torrance	3	1	0	2
Fr. Philip Wells	3	3	0	0

Group C

Mrs June Ben Rabah	3	0	0	3
Mrs Emily Champion	2	0	2	0
Mrs Judith Fudger	1	1	0	0
Mr Matthew Harris	3	1	1	1***
Ms Victoria O'Reilly	2	0	1	1
Ms Jaymie Pauvaday	2	2	0	0
Ms Cerys Siney	3	1	0	2

***as a Baptist representative in Group A

	Possible	Apologies submitted	Absent	Actual
<u>Group D</u>				
Councillor Esther Amaning	2	0	0	2
Councillor Derry Begho	2	0	0	2
Councillor Nigel Betts	1	1	0	0
Councillor Sybil Camsey	1	1	0	0
Councillor Christine Catterall (Chairman)	3	0	0	3
Councillor Ross Downing	2	1	1	0
Councillor Sue Gower MBE	1	0	0	1
Councillor Steven Hall	2	1	1	0
Councillor James Hunt	1	1	0	0
Councillor David Hurt	2	0	0	2
Councillor Howard Jackson	1	0	0	1
Councillor David Leaf	2	0	0	2
Councillor Wendy Perfect	1	1	0	0

Adviser and local authority lead officers

Ms Virginia Corbyn	3	0	0	3
Ms Jo Lakey	1	0	1	0
Mrs Lauren Ovenden	2	1	0	1

7. SACRE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Our activities

Bexley SACRE is a member of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE). As mentioned earlier in this report, we have adopted the NASACRE Code of Conduct.

The SACRE works in collaboration with the local Diocesan Boards.

The CRiBS organisation (Christian Resources in Bexley Schools) continues to be represented on the SACRE.

A local Mosque has kindly offered their premises for the SACRE to hold a meeting, and confirmed an offer to schools to undertake an educational visit.

In the past year a local Inter Faith Forum was resurrected, and through our Adviser, who has direct contact with the Forum Chairman, we are looking to strengthen links. Our initial contact enabled us to fill one of our member vacancies.

The contribution of the SACRE to the local authority agenda is primarily through the provision of RE resources and RE subject leader training and networking events, all reported elsewhere. However, the local authority recently established a new Community Partnerships Team, and we are generating contacts and exploring the possibilities for some joint working in the future.

Community cohesion

As mentioned above, opportunities to work with our local authority's Community Partnerships Team are being explored.

Consultations and correspondence

We discuss topics of interest in the regular issues of the NASACRE Newsletter. However, there were two pieces of national interest that warranted detailed discussions at our meetings in this academic year.

Firstly, the SACRE has been following closely, and with interest, the work of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE), and we set aside time to discuss their interim report, Religious Education for All. The SACRE recognised many of the issues as being long term national matters that have been on the radar for some time, with some applicable to Bexley. We discussed the issues and barriers in RE teaching, the implications for SACREs of some of the interim proposals and discussed the report's headline recommendations. We also agreed and submitted a collective response to the CoRE call for further evidence. We await the final report with interest.

Secondly, we also dedicated some time to study the report, The State of the Nation: A Report on RE Provision within Secondary Schools in England. We agreed that the report highlighted a number of issues that would not be news to the SACRE, or to many of those who teach RE. Prior to discussions, we commissioned a confidential survey of our local authority's 21 secondary schools. However, perhaps

symptomatic of some of the issues highlighted in the report, just one third of the schools responded. That said, some analysis of the results was possible, but the broad implications suggest that Bexley is in part reflective of the national picture, with half of the report findings being applicable.

Those schools who did respond provided some interesting comments, such as: the apparent societal disinclination to value religion; intransigent opposition to RE in some quarters; the new GCSE specifications are dull, unimaginative and take RE backwards 20 years; and, the need to rebrand RE.

The SACRE discussed what, if anything, it could or should do for the Borough's schools and the view is that until we are given more powers to be able to make a difference, there was very little that we could do to respond to the local and national issues highlighted.

When discussing both reports, our school survey results and last year's Annual report, the SACRE concluded that the Government should take note and, as a consequence, our Chairman wrote to the Secretary of State for Education with a number of concerns. The SACRE was disappointed to receive a response from the Department's correspondence section which, in the opinion of our members, failed to properly address any of the matters raised. The view was that the issues had been brushed aside, which is precisely the reaction those involved in RE for many years have always encountered. Members are of the opinion that the Government must address the marginalisation of RE as a matter of priority, and recognise the vital role RE plays in making a positive impact on society. Doing nothing is no longer an option.

Equality

When using the locally Agreed Syllabus, the SACRE has made it clear that schools need to take into account the position that some faith groups take with regard to human sexuality, so that LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi sexual, and Transgendered) young people are not made to feel vulnerable when these issues are being explored.

8. SUMMARY

This report summarises the activities of the Bexley SACRE in the 2017-18 academic year, all against a continuing backdrop of difficult times for the public sector, teachers of RE, and SACREs.

The SACRE relies on financial and staffing resources that are already stretched and has reached a point where we feel we can no longer add to the burdens we already place on those people who already do so much for us, either as local authority employees, our volunteer members or advisers. This does impact on the amount of work we feel we can undertake in any one year.

We do feel that RE and the role of SACREs has been sidelined and urge the Secretary of State and the DfE to be more attentive to the role that RE and SACREs play. The response the SACRE received to a letter to the Secretary of State was bland and not helpful, and is also symptomatic of the lack of interest and marginalisation of RE by this and previous Governments.

Our SACRE and RE in the Borough benefits immensely from the contributions made by our teachers and representatives from faith groups. They voluntarily give their time and share their expertise for the benefit of our community and country and this contribution should also be recognised by the Government. We would value and welcome recognition, dialogue and input for the work that SACREs undertake, and indeed for the work that all SACREs undertake, especially in view of the dedication and commitment shown by those who volunteer to support us.

The fact that this report must be produced each year and, according to legislation, must be submitted to a long time non-existent Government body seems to sum up the lack of attention paid to RE by those in Government.

It is good practice to include Religious Studies examinations results, but the extremely late release of results by the Government in January 2019 has not assisted in the timely preparation of this Report.

We hope the final report and recommendations arising from the Commission on RE opens the eyes of Ministers and the DfE to the many issues facing this most important subject. Whilst we did not necessarily agree with all the recommendations arising, and believe the report has left several important questions unanswered, it does at least highlight that much needs to be done to raise the profile of RE and to ensure that it does not continue to suffer the decline that is clearly evident nationally, much of which is attributable to repeated Government intransigence.

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