

Leicester SACRE Annual Report 2023-24

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Introduction from the Chair

A key feature of the make-up of Leicester SACRE is to reflect the spread of faith groups and worldviews in designing the new RE syllabus and the way schools nurture the social and spiritual life of children. This year we revisited our constitution to bring the status of our humanist representatives in line with those of other faiths, the teaching profession and the City Council.

During the year we became very concerned that the amount of work undertaken by Wendy Harrison, our Consultant RE Adviser, far exceeded the hours she was being paid. We raised the issue with the City Council (bearing in mind that we are a statutory body and RE is a compulsory subject which must follow the local agreed syllabus) and the matter was addressed. As well as considering problems with the quality and depth of religious education nationwide as reported by Ofsted and the Religious Education Council, there have been local situations to deal with: for example, clarifying how headteachers deal fairly with absence for religious observance in term time and preparing schools to apply for determinations to reflect their lived experience of faith and world views. We commissioned Wendy under a separate contract to review the Leicester Agreed Syllabus, which is now progressing well. This work was supported by additional funding from the LA.

We were happy to support local initiatives to provide resources that schools can use: the St Phillip's 'Memories of Living Well Together' oral history project, also the Leicester Schools Peace Project under construction. We have also heard of plans for training for school visits run by RE hubs. All of these will supplement the new Agreed Syllabus. We are aware that increasing numbers of schools are moving out of LA control into Academy Trusts. Although they must teach RE they are not obliged to adhere to the AS or the guidance on collective worship unless they choose to.

We have noted the outcome of the Michaela school court case, and we plan to come back and discuss the issue of collective worship in due course.

We remember with sadness Sandra Cohen who died this year. We appreciate the involvement and hard work which she gave to SACRE and thank all the members of SACRE for their continued commitment.

Anne Fishenden
Chair of Leicester SACRE

Background

The Education Reform Act (1988) established compulsory Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRE) in all Local Authorities (LAs). The main function of a SACRE is to advise the LA on matters connected with RE and collective worship. SACREs also oversee the five-yearly revision of the locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education (RE) and consider any complaints about the provision and delivery of RE and collective worship referred to it by the LA. ¹

The membership of SACREs comprises four groups, together with nominated Advisers. The groups are:

Committee A: Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations

Committee B: The Church of England

Committee C: Teachers' Associations

Committee D: The Local Authority.

[Please see Appendix, p.12 for membership/attendance of Leicester SACRE 2022-23]

Also in attendance at Leicester SACRE meetings

Clerk to SACRE: Beejal Madhvani

Melanie Gaiderman: LA

Allan Hayes: Co-opted Humanist member

Wendy Harrison (WH): Consultant RE Adviser

Meetings and membership 2023-24

Leicester SACRE held five meetings during this period: 9th November 2023 (at the Baitul Ikram Mosque), 7th December 2023 at Crown Hills Community College, 8th February 2024 (at the Quaker Meeting House), 18th April 2024 (Teams) and 6th June 2024 (Teams). The meeting planned for the 5th September did not go ahead as planned (although some members were present) due to technical problems with Teams, making the meeting inquorate.

Items discussed during meetings

November 9th 2023

SACRE were asked to address a query from the LA regarding the rules for teachers/children who request time off for religious festivals. WH had approached NASACRE and they advised they were not aware of a clear ruling. LAs used their discretion but it was suggested that WH contacted Claire Clinton, R.E Adviser for the London Borough of Newham. Claire supported NASACRE's view about discretion. In Newham they use the term 'observance' rather than 'festivals.' When a request is made headteachers ask why it is necessary to take time off during the day, i.e. to establish which part of religious observance can only take place during this time – many celebrations take place during the evening. Two days a year are permitted. SACRE members discussed this at length.

Summary:

1. One day per year should be allowed for religious observance, when the occasion falls on a weekday. For any additional days, a teacher would have to take unpaid leave - or in the case of a pupil, unauthorised absence.

2. If appropriate, the headteacher should ask which specific aspects of observance need to be followed during the day (in some festivals most activities happen mainly in the evening).
3. It is impossible for SACRE to produce a list of 'approved' days of observance as these are forever changing and vary within groups.
4. At present different schools take a variety of approaches, often based on goodwill and at the headteacher's discretion - and for many, this works, so SACRE would not wish to be too prescriptive.

Humanism and Committee A

Members discussed whether they wished to advise Leicester City Council to review SACRE's Constitution to include Humanist representation as part of Committee A. This is within the context of the 2021 data and the recent court case where a Humanist argued the case (and won) that he should be a full SACRE member, as opposed to being co-opted. Allan Hayes has been a valued part of SACRE for many years during which he has shared his wisdom as a Humanist co-opted member. This court case set a precedent and could potentially allow Leicester SACRE to change the Constitution to include Humanists as full members with voting rights. Members agreed this was a positive way forward for SACRE. EW raised the point that SACRE must be aware of the difference between the Secular Society and British Humanists, as represented in Leicester. This was carried forward to the next meeting, when the Constitution would be an agenda item.

Sandra Cohen

WH shared the very sad news that Sandra had passed away in July, following a long illness. Sandra contributed a great deal to religious education, particularly in terms of developing pupils' understanding of Judaism and the Jewish community in Leicester. She played a massive part in obtaining the funding for the development of the Education Centre at the Leicester shul. WH made a personal tribute and informed members that she had sent a card from members to Sandra's family.

Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting

WH updated members on the progress of the AS. The primary advisory group had met on three occasions and agreed on the structure set out by WH. This was set out for members in a PowerPoint presentation and received very positively. It was explained that the four main strands ensured progression from Reception to key stage 3 and the themes for each year would ensure continuity and coherence across years. A balance of Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions as well as non-religious worldviews is built in. This would be presented to primary teachers at the next network meeting on November 23rd. During the spring term the focus would be on the secondary phase with members of the CLARET (City of Leicester Association of Religious Education Teachers) forming the secondary advisory group. Interviews would also take place with SACRE members, to contribute to a sense of lived experiences in the syllabus, in line with the worldviews approach. Members approved the actions taken so far.

<h3>8th February 2024</h3>
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Martin Ward (from Leicester Humanists) was welcomed as a guest.

Constitution and membership: As the meeting was not quorate (no representation on Committee D) it was not possible to vote on this issue, but this did not prevent discussion and recommendations. Two separate issues were identified

1.The Constitution

WH explained that she had met with EW and ST some months ago and used the NASACRE document for reference¹. They recommended that the present Constitution should be slimmed down (omitting, for example, the over-complicated formula for deciding on representation) and should also include NASACRE's Code of Conduct². Overall, the document requires a complete re-write to bring it up to date. A draft has been drawn up by WH/EW/ST: this needs to be taken to a vote when the meeting is quorate.

2.Membership

The Chair alerted members to gaps in membership, e.g. Roman Catholic, Sikh, Jewish. Also, some people who were officially still members of SACRE had missed a significant number of meetings. It was suggested that they should be contacted by the Clerk. WH would follow this up but raised the issue of her own time. She is allocated approximately 2 days a month for RE/SACRE work and has already gone significantly over this time. She would continue to log her time but members agreed that this was a serious issue as it meant that potentially they might not be able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

SMSC analysis

Due to time constraints (see above), only a small amount of time was spent on this item. WH pointed out that most comments were favourable, if not always particularly evaluative or constructive. It was noted that Ofsted continued to choose other subjects over RE for deep dives, something that is reflected nationally.

Annual Report 2022-23

WH still waiting for examination data – report would then be sent to members for checking, in time for the next SACRE meeting.

Religious Education Council school data (from Deborah Weston)

Caution was advised when interpreting this data. WH to follow this up by approaching secondary schools and asking about provision. NJ suggested using Leicester Education Improvement Partnership.

RE Conference

Members were provided with information about the Leicester DBE & Leicestershire County Council Primary RE Conference, to be held on 11th June 2024.

Guidance on acts of collective worship

Due to recent queries and misunderstandings, Mel Gaiderman had suggested to WH that SACRE produced brief guidance for schools in Leicester. WH referred to the issues set out in item 3 above. She would prepare draft guidance as soon as was realistically possible. A discussion took place about collective worship. This included the recent issue at the Michaela School in London. Although this revolved around prayer times rather than collective worship, it raised the issue of how such things should be handled in schools, especially non-faith schools. Members agreed to return to this issue once the outcome of the Michaela issue was known.

¹ <https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SACRE-constitution.pdf>

² <https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Code-of-conduct.pdf>

Report

Deep and Meaningful: the Religious Education Subject Report (Ofsted)³

Reference was drawn to the opening paragraph: *'RE in schools is generally of poor quality. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought. As a subject on the curriculum, it is under-valued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools' job harder'*.⁴ This was considered to be very pertinent in terms of the impact on RE in Leicester schools.

Venues for future meetings

Members were asked to give some thought to this. The Quaker Meeting House was very popular but wi-fi appeared to be an ongoing issue. LW suggested St Anne's church but access might be difficult for some members. Item would be discussed again at the next meeting – which should be held at Bridge Junior School, due to the school's determination.

St Philip's project

EW provided information about St Philip's project, 'Memories of Living Well Together: An Oral History Project'. This project records the memories of thirty-one people who have migrated to Leicester from overseas. Separate resources are available for primary and secondary schools.

Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting.

- Primary advisory group – very good progress being made, supported by headteachers releasing teachers for a whole day in January. A further full day agreed, thanks in part to a letter to schools from MG thanking them for their support with this work.
- Secondary advisory group – first meeting on 13th February.
- Input from SACRE members – in keeping with the worldviews approach, WH was keen to include contributions from SACRE members, either via questionnaires or recorded interviews. Members to be contacted in due course.

18th April 2024 (via Teams)

Annual Report 2022-23

WH provided an update and explained that there was a delay due to examination data being received late. She also noted that SACRE receives less information about exam results year on year. The Annual Report was now complete and WH asked members to send any minor amendments by the following Monday. She thanked members who had been involved for their contribution. Report to be sent to NASACRE and DfE.

St Phillip's Project: update since previous meeting

EW provided further information about this project, 'Memories of Living Well Together: An Oral History Project'. The project had now concluded; it was small-scale and had received Heritage bid funding. The group would like to put a bid in for

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-religious-education/deep-and-meaningful-the-religious-education-subject-report>

⁴ <https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s172681/Ofsted%20annual%20Report%20202223%20RE.pdf>

a larger scale project involving many more respondents from a variety of backgrounds. Some of the oral archive interviews will be of benefit in terms of RE resource materials. The project supports worldviews in RE, using real ethnography, real people's voices and/or writing from Leicester people. It will bring long-term cultural benefit to Leicester and will be logged with East Midlands Oral history archive for future generations. Timescale for the project is a couple of years. SACRE has been asked by Rev Dr Tom Wilson, Director of St Philips Centre, to send a letter of support for the bid. No financial commitment is involved. AF asked for members' views and if they were happy for both the Chair and Vice Chair to send a letter of support. RB shared that in her school they have used case studies from the first two booklets with pupils who enjoyed reading them. They liked looking at stories from real people from Leicester. No objections were noted and agreed for SACRE would send a letter of support.

National Content Standard for RE⁵

This document, produced by the REC is largely aimed at academies. It is not a syllabus or statutory document but guidance for schools and syllabus writers. WH to discuss further in the June meeting.

SACRE webinars.

WH provided a brief overview, stating that these sessions were very useful, providing a good overview for both current and new SACRE members. She suggested that they could be used for Leicester SACRE training during future meetings.

Venue suggestions for meetings

SACRE was facing issues regarding venues for upcoming meetings. Members suggested a few potential venues, e.g. Madani, MacMillian Cancer centre, Leicester Islamic Centre, Markfield.

Michaela school outcome: update to previous meeting

The High Court ruled in favour of Michaela Community School, after it was sued by a Muslim pupil who objected to the school's prayer ban. SA asked members if since the last SACRE meeting members had any thoughts and whether it is something SACRE should look at as there could be some repercussions and whether other schools may follow suit. AF suggested that this should be pursued later as the outcome was only made public very recently. EW suggested that a next step might be to look at some best practice examples for collective worship for city schools.

Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting.

Overview of Reception – Year 6

WH shared an overview and briefly discussed an example from year 1, explaining how the sections are broken up. WH asked for members for questions and feedback. Are there other perspectives/ faiths in other parts of the syllabus? WH explained that there were and how these were broken down to be manageable for teachers. Care has been taken to include a balance of Christianity, other traditions as well as non-religious worldviews.

⁵ <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/national-content-standard-1st-edition-2023/>

Secondary structure: next steps

Work has begun on the secondary structure, based on the same 4 strands as for primary. Teachers are allowed more flexibility in terms of how and when they teach different units or pathways. The next stage is to ensure progression and statutory requirements, e.g. compulsory elements of Christianity.

Timeline for completion

The syllabus is on track to be completed by the end of August. Once agreed by the ASC it will go to the LA for scrutiny. In the unlikely event of completion being delayed, this does not pose a significance problem – it is more important to make sure that no aspect of the syllabus is rushed through and as many people and organisations as possible are fully involved.

6th June 2024 (via Teams): AGM

Voting for Chair and Vice Chair

AF and SA had been in their roles for one year and it is customary in Leicester SACRE to remain as Chair and Vice chair for two years. AF stated they would like to continue and asked members if there were any objections. No objections were noted.

Update on Bridge determination.

WH provided an update with regards to Bridge Junior School's determination. As the school is in the process of becoming an academy, they will no longer require a determination from the LA but instead will go through the DfE process.

Update on membership.

WH proposed forming a sub-group during summer to get to grips with this issue. This would require a few members meeting face to face to go through the current membership list, contact members who have not attended for a long time and recruit potential members. They would also need to review the paper which was produced during the previous year. It was agreed that this group would produce a completed list which would be brought back to SACRE in September.

Ofsted update

WH shared her concern that Ofsted intends to reduce the number of deep dives carried out, i.e. where schools are judged to be good. It was noted that the number of deep dives for RE was already low. The new approach would mean that members received even less guidance about RE. WH hopeful that the introduction of the new syllabus will enable more direct communication with schools. JC raised awareness of the difficulties faced by many secondary teachers, i.e. pupils coming from different feeder schools who have often been taught different levels of basic RE.

NASACRE Annual Conference: EW

Westhill project: Feedback was introduced by Sukayna (NASCRE Chair) regarding the Westhill Project and a presentation was given by AB and EW. They were thanked for sharing information about the Leicester Schools Peace Project. AF shared the following: 'It provides a wonderful platform for young people to comprehend and advocate for peace in their lives. Elizabeth, your insights on how the project will be incorporated into the newly agreed syllabus and its potential impact on the students in Leicester are truly significant.' EW highlighted the main areas of the annual conference with members.

LA funding: some LAs recognise the need for RE CPD in their schools, realising the importance of developing cohesion and continuity. Following the introduction of a new syllabus some LA's have prioritised this. SACREs need to be aware and seek additional funding, for example, when launching the syllabus and providing follow up training.

Open letter: regarding teacher training for secondary schools, there have been very few or no bursaries for R.E. A small bursary training will be available for this coming year. The issue of recruitment and retention in R.E was discussed. Both are issues of concern for all subjects, but there is a significant shortage of RE subject specialists. There was concern nationally that the subject knowledge enhancement course which graduate teachers apply for has been reduced. A lack of funding after a certain date earlier this year will impact the potential number of recruits, particularly into the secondary sector for next academic year. The RE debate in the House of Lords earlier this year and REady for work campaign is to encourage major employers around the country to recognise and value R. E. More information will be available this autumn. EW provided information regarding R.E hubs. Organisations within the RE world have worked together to create a free central resource where we are encouraged to share links for resources, including training to help SACRE members and to help teachers who are new to R.E or seeking information.

Up-skilling: more development of areas around visits and visitors. There are regional information sections to explain where this is available and speakers who have obtained appropriate training are listed. This will help us to encourage more people to be confident in terms of activities with schools and especially as Leicester moves forward with the next part of the new agreed syllabus. EW to share further details with the Chair with regards to the training which will be shared with members. link <https://www.re-hubs.uk> Another useful resource online is from Culham St Gabriel's, available for both primary and secondary teachers. EW raised another important point that was discussed at conference, i.e. that SACREs need to be thinking all the time about how they can include schools that are within Multi-Academy Trusts.

Venues for future meetings

WH explained that due to fewer determinations it has been impossible to hold meetings at schools. Members continued to suggest potential venues to allow face-to-face meetings. AF shared that it had been good to see more members during the online Teams meetings.

Membership

AF shared that Jill Patterson, a long-standing member of Leicester SACRE would be leaving due to securing a new job in the county. EW passed on a message from TM, currently on maternity leave.

Requests for advice

NJ raised vexatious complaints and challenges from parents raised at the Schools and Settings Consultative Committee meeting and asked how SACRE could assist. She shared that there had been an increase in complaints received by leaders who often needed advice about how to respond. WH stated that while SACRE was willing to provide some advice, the LA needed to provide realistic funding to provide this service, which could be very time consuming. NJ also raised the issue of determinations and how schools that have joined a MAT could potentially acquire paid services from SACRE to help them with the process. This required further discussion.

Agreed Syllabus Conference

Update on primary and secondary sections.

WH provided a brief syllabus update. On track for competition August 31st but reminded members that this is a 'tentative' finish date. The important thing is to make sure everything is as we want it to be.

Primary: two further meetings will take place, to finish the sections on a) assessment b) early years.

Secondary: this is a very busy period for secondary colleagues, but a draft framework has been completed. Once this has been viewed and agreed by secondary colleagues it will be shared with SACRE members.

Special Schools: the syllabus will include plans and examples from special schools. This was to be welcomed.

WH had some interviews scheduled for July so that the syllabus can contain quotes from people representing different worldviews. Members were asked to contact her if they would like to be involved.

Launch in June 2024

The purpose of launching before completion was to enable teachers to know the basic structure and context to enable them to incorporate new planning in time for September. There is no obligation to do this. Many schools may wait until they have the complete version.

Launch details.

WH to share links with the Clerk for members to attend the online sessions if they wish.

WH suggested a one off special online meeting to share the full syllabus with members before it is sent to LA.

Examination results 2024

Examination results summary: GCSE Full Course

National Averages in brackets

2022		
Gender	9-4 (Standard pass)	9-5 (Strong pass)
Male	71.8% (70.4%)	60.2% (58.2%)
Female	88.3% (82.2%)	97.4% (72.8%)
All	76.5% (76.8%)	68.5%(61.1%)
2023		
Gender	9-4 (Standard pass)	9-5 (Strong pass)
Male	59.9 (64.9%)	50.1% (52.8%)
Female	71.5(82.2%)	62.9% (65.8%)
All	65.7% (72.2%)	56.5%(61.3%)
2024		
Gender	9-4 (Standard pass)	9-5 (Strong pass)
Male	66.6 (53.2%)	51.3% (53.2%)
Female	78.9 (76.2%)	67.2% (66%)
All	71% (65.7%)	60% (56.5%)

Links with other organisations

Leicester SACRE has links with organisations such as the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE), RE Today/National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), RE Hubs-East Midlands, Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (AREIAC), the Religious Education Council (REC) as well as local faith communities.

SACRE Training

Members are kept up to date about local and national initiatives through regular training in meetings delivered by the Consultant RE Adviser. They are also directed to appropriate online training from organisations such as NASACRE and Culham St Gabriel's.

SACRE Funding

This continues to support the work of the Consultant RE Adviser for approximately two days per month.

Appendix 1: SACRE Membership and Attendance 2023-24

Group A

Faith	Name	09.11.23	07.12.23	08.02.24	18.04.24	06.06.24	05.09.24
Baha'i	Stephanie Maude	P		P	P	P	P
Free Evangelical	Pastor Brian Niblock						
Hindu	Dipak Kumar Fakey						
Hindu	Hiten Bhatt						
Hindu	Vibhooti Acharya						
Methodist	Stephen Thompson	P	P	P	P	P	P
Muslim	Seema Ahmad	P	P	P	P		P
Ahmadiyya Muslim	Imam Muneeb Ur Rahmam	P		P			
Quakers	Anne Fishenden	P	P	P	P	P	P
Salvation Army	Jean Denton						
Jewish	Sarah Cohen						

Group B

Faith	Name	09.11.23	07.12.23	08.02.24	18.04.24	06.06.24	05.09.24
Church of England	Elizabeth Wayne	P	P	P	P	P	P
	Jill Carr	P				P	
	Rev Elizabeth (Liz) Wilson			P		P	P
	Kim Peake						
	Tracey Manns				P		

Group C

Faith	Name	09.11.23	07.12.23	08.02.24	18.04.24	06.06.24	05.09.24
CLARET Secondary	Jill Patterson				P		
NAHT Primary	Nazma Jassat			P	P	P	P
NATRE Primary	Nausheen Aziz						
NUT/NEU Primary	Emma Wright						
Secondary	Mayuri Parekh						
NATRE Primary	Rachel Buckby		P		P	P	

Group D

	Name	09.11.23	07.12.23	08.02.24	18.04.24	06.06.24	05.09.24
Members of the Local authority LCC	Cllr Mustafa Malik				P	P	
	Cllr Manjula Sood	P	P		P	P	
	Melanie Gaiderman						

Faith	Name	09.11.23	07.12.23	08.02.24	18.04.24	06.06.24	05.09.24
Humanist	Allan Hayes		P	P	P	P	P
	Martin Ward			P (first meeting)		P	P