



**The Merton
Standing Advisory Council
on
Religious Education**

**Annual Report
for 2023 – 2024**

July 2025

I am delighted to send you Merton SACRE's Annual Report for the academic year 2023-2024. Every SACRE is required to publish a report and to make it available to schools and the wider public. It also helps us to focus on our strengths and see how any weaknesses can be developed into strengths!

The quality of religious education, based on exam outcomes, remains strong and qualitative feedback received remains positive. Interfaith dialogue work with a group of sixth formers, from several of our Secondary schools in the borough, brings pupils together to visit and converse successfully with many local faiths and belief systems – this work is a real strength and is receiving very positive feedback.

SACRE members have continued to work diligently to understand, and respond to, what our local schools want from an RE syllabus and also to agree what a renewed syllabus might achieve. Our Syllabus is popular and well used and we have been discussing in depth if it is still fit for purpose. This discussion has continued to be influenced by national debates on worldviews and by local feedback from members and schools.

We hold our meetings in different places of worship within our borough - to highlight the many opportunities there are for schools to visit as part of their RE curriculum. It also helps to broaden our members' knowledge of the faith and belief make-up of the London Borough of Merton. We have also individually visited schools to hear about the excellent work they are doing, so that we can keep our members informed of any changing needs - fulfilling SACRE's role in supporting quality RE advice in the Borough.

Merton is a wonderfully multicultural and religiously diverse community to grow up in. Many of our children need help to navigate and benefit from this at a local, as well as a global world level. This year, we have continued to see the challenges and effect of global issues on our children in the borough, and how RE teachers have to respond to such challenges.

We have participated in the ongoing national conversation about the role of RE and will continue to seek to help schools understand, and celebrate, the diverse faith and belief presence in the London Borough of Merton.

Mrs. Geetha Maheshwaran

**Chair of Merton SACRE
July 2024**

SACRE MEETINGS

Geetha Maheshwaran (Hindu Representative) was continued as Chair and John Carter (Humanism Representative) was elected Vice-chair. Three meetings were held during the academic year and minutes are available from the LA and on the council website.

The SACRE group continued to meet in places of worship around the Borough where they met in the Shree Ghanapathy Hindu Temple. To support SACRE members in their role in advising the authority on the quality of RE in schools they were also hosted in Ricards Lodge High school. A further meeting was held at the council offices.

The key issues debated were:

Merton Agreed syllabus review



Word cloud from 2022-3 in teachers' responses to the Merton Agreed Syllabus.

In the February meeting:

Following on from 2022-3 consultation with schools on the agreed syllabus, SACRE devoted two meetings to discussing and agreeing a way forward on our agreed syllabus. The members discussed the concept of worldviews, the feedback from schools, the national picture, feedback from the NASCRE conference and the belief make-up of the Merton community. They agreed that they preferred the concept of a 'programme of modifications' to a wholesale change of the syllabus.

SACRE agreed unanimously:

- To retain the Merton Agreed Syllabus for five years.
- It further agreed to adapt the primary RE syllabus to include teaching units on Humanism, Buddhism and Sikhism. It agreed to establish a sub-committee to produce the additional units.
- SACRE further agreed to review existing units at secondary level to discover if there was an opportunity for more comparative teaching on denominations within faiths and to introduce a mandatory, rather than optional, Humanism unit.
- SACRE members agreed to meet RE leads from the three Merton secondary schools known to use its syllabus, Ricards Lodge, Rutlish and Raynes Park, to talk about how the syllabus works in the three schools. The members agreed that KS should also ask Harris Academies in Morden and Merton if they would like to be involved.

In the July meeting they added

- SACRE had agreed to make sure the syllabus acknowledged the diversity within religious traditions, adding more on denominations and varying beliefs within faiths.

Interfaith Dialogue between pupils with feedback to SACRE members and a wider audience.

Building on the 6th form Interfaith Dialogue project begun in 2019-20, SACRE initiated a new group project, bringing together 20 Year 12 students from St Mark's Academy, Raynes Park High School, Ricards Lodge and Ursuline High School. SACRE members had been extremely positive about increasing their support for secondary school RE. This project offers the students an opportunity to visit a range of places of worship in Merton and to meet leaders of faith and belief at each. At each venue, students meet in small groups to discuss a theme from their belief perspective with others who may come from different faith or belief perspectives. The students visited a Church of England Church, an Ahmadiyya Mosque, a Synagogue, a Hindu Temple and a Buddhist Temple. Each year the project takes feedback from the students and they requested that Humanism be added this year. This session was run at the council offices and allowed the students time to listen to the perspectives of humanist and then in school groups ask questions and discussion with 4 different humanists. All members felt that this project, which had been well supported by SACRE members, who had offered their places of worship and given up time to meet students, was of great benefit. Student feedback was universally positive, despite the demands of balancing the timing of the sessions with work experience, exams and coursework. Further feedback had been sought at the end of the year to develop the program. Students fed back very positively on 2023-4

What is your religious/non-religious affiliation? This question is voluntary

I am a Muslim.

What went well? What was most interesting thing you have learned? What did you enjoy most? Which was the most valuable experience? What skills did you develop?

It was really interesting to meet other people and learning about their religious beliefs.

What is your religious/non-religious affiliation? This question is voluntary

Hinduism

What went well? What was most interesting thing you have learned? What did you enjoy most? Which was the most valuable experience? What skills did you develop?

You get to explore different religions. Also you get to hear interesting stories. The most valuable experience I had was buddhist temple because it had creative pictures on the wall.

What is your religious/non-religious affiliation? This question is voluntary

I am muslim

What went well? What was most interesting thing you have learned? What did you enjoy most? Which was the most valuable experience? What skills did you develop?

I learnt the moral laws and rules of different religions. I also learnt the reasonings and beliefs of different faiths.

Sacre Members have led the Year 12 interfaith group.



Initial session at St Peter and St Paul Church Mitcham



Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Mosque in Morden



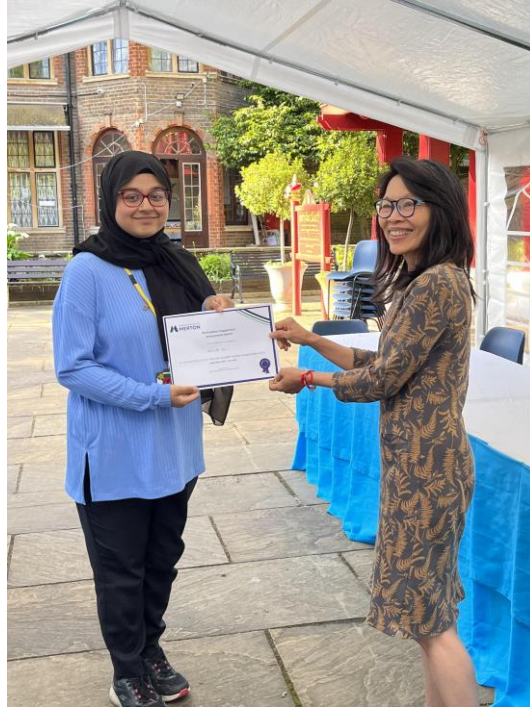
Wimbledon Synagogue (Jewish)



Shree Ghanapathy (Hindu) Temple in Wimbledon



Discussion on Humanism at the Meron Civic Center



Final session with certificates at the Buddhist Temple in Wimbledon

6th Form Interfaith Dialogue groups visit the Buddhist Temple, Ahmadiyya Mosque, Wimbledon Synagogue, Hindu Temple and St Peter and Paul Church as well as a discussion session on Humanism.

SACRE members continued their focus on the quality of RE in Merton schools.

They looked at the hours of RE per week taught in secondary schools and sought clarification from two schools. They were concerned about the approach to RE being taught in drop down days as part of PSHE at one secondary school and agreed to contact that school to ask if they could hold their autumn meeting of 2024 at the school to further understand the school's approach to RE teaching and to consider if it is in line with the Agreed Syllabus expectations. Members asked to attend school assemblies and schools volunteered to host members. They had a detailed presentation and in-depth discussion at Ricards Lodge High school and understand that the RE curriculum is more than **what happens in** the classroom - **visually** across the school, in assemblies and in after school clubs. SACRE members were highly impressed with

the high standards and the richness of their curriculum. They had further discussion about the work of the Abbotsbury school's year 6 faith ambassadors and members were invited to meet them.

Other issues discussed at SACRE meetings

The October 7th attacks and the war in Gaza

Members were concerned to hear how the war was affecting classrooms and children in the borough. They were concerned about the experience of Jewish and Muslim families and had feedback from schools about how RE teaching was helping children understand the complexity of the situation.

Membership

Membership has been an ongoing challenge. New members have joined the group but also there have been significant vacancy that have been hard to fill.

Safeguarding

The Merton Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) gave presentation to the group. The members discussed their safeguarding arrangements for children visiting places of worship.

SACRE aims going forward into 2024/25:

- **To take forward the incremental approach to modifying the syllabus**
- **To further develop the 6th form Interfaith Dialogue Group**
- **Seek feedback from schools on the quality of RE by visiting Raynes Park School and hearing feedback from the RE department.**

SACRE members would like to thank all their hosts for their hospitality. The aim of holding meetings in different education and faith or belief venues is to evidence the interfaith agreement of the SACRE: to support children of all faiths and beliefs or none to be educated about all the main local religions and belief groups. The chair and vice chair attended the NASACRE conference and hold an annual meeting with the Director of Children's Services in Merton to update the directorate on the work of Merton SACRE.

www.merton.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/services-for-schools/sacre

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RESOURCES

The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Merton Schools – hard copies are available from Merton Civic Centre

https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/sacre_agreed_syllabus_2017.pdf

Directory of places of worship (updated 2017) – hard copies are available from Merton Civic Centre

https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/re_directory_of_places_of_worship.pdf

Talking about difficult things in RE

https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/sacre_guidance_talking_about_difficult_things_in_re.doc

Meeting the needs of Muslim Pupils in Merton schools

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/NeedsMuslimPupilsMerton.pdf>

SACRE constitution

https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files/sacre_constitution_2024.docx

STANDARDS

SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) Development, British Values, faith and culture references in school Ofsted reports inspected 2022-23

These are direct quotations from the school Ofsted reports.

Ricards Lodge High School

Outstanding

All pupils have access to a wide range of additional opportunities in the school. These include a range of sports and music clubs, philosophy club and writing for the school paper, 'The Ricardian'.

Cranmer School

Good

All pupils take part in regular debates. Staff encourage them to discuss difficult questions such as the difference between fairness and equality. Several parents commented on how caring the school is.

Singlegate School

Outstanding

Leaders have worked hard to build a community where everyone works together. Diversity and differences are actively celebrated. Pupils have excellent behaviour. This begins in the early years, where staff develop children's resilience and routines expertly. Leaders are highly committed to pupils' safety, which ensures that the school is a highly welcoming place. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They are highly motivated in lessons and relish the rich opportunities on offer. The school places a sharp focus on pupils' character development. Staff encourage pupils to appreciate their social responsibilities. Pupils are taught about key themes such as conflict, discrimination, tolerance and respect.

Hollymount School

Good

Pupils are incredibly proud of their school. They embrace and celebrate the diversity in the school. Pupils said that they enjoy learning from each other about different cultures and ways of thinking. Pupils are very happy at this caring school where there is a strong sense of community.

Wimbledon Chase School

Good

The opportunities for wider development are remarkable. Pupils, including those in the specially resourced provision for pupils with speech, language and communication needs, take on significant leadership roles. These build on the school's 'Cornerstone Rules' that all pupils know and live, such as being kind, positive, respectful and inclusive.

The curriculum, assemblies and leadership opportunities build on the school's values. As a result,

pupils value equality and care for others. For example, older pupils give their time to run activities for those younger than themselves. Teachers want pupils to have an impact, and pupil ambassadors set up their own clubs and events for other pupils to join. The curriculum includes a focus on celebrating diversity and developing positive mental health. As a result, pupils feel able to talk about any issues they are facing and know that their teachers care about their well-being.

Harris Academy Morden

Outstanding

Pupils develop as confident and articulate citizens, willing to speak up, including against injustice and discrimination.

St Marks Academy

Outstanding

The school's cultural diversity is celebrated by all at every turn. For example, pupils from the school council talk proudly of their leadership of the recent culture days.

All pupils, including those in the sixth form, benefit from a very high-quality programme of pastoral support called 'Lifeology'. They learn about important issues such as consent, puberty and how to stay safe. Every opportunity is taken to support pupils' character development, for example in assemblies, religious services or conversations in the corridor.

Bishop Gilpin School

Outstanding

There is a focus on cultural development, understanding the world around us and acceptance of others.

The school places a strong focus on pupils' personal development. For example, pupils are taught about the importance of respecting and valuing different faiths and cultures.

Melrose Special School

Good

No relevant comments in the inspection report.

Holy Trinity School

Outstanding

This is a welcoming and friendly school, where pupils are exceptionally supportive of each other, caring and kind. The school teaches pupils extensively about the importance of community through shared 'growing together' values and initiatives, such as a monthly collection for a local food bank. Pupils take up responsibilities widely. For example, reading ambassadors in Year 6 read with younger pupils. Junior leadership team members helped to write the school's 'equality charter'.

Merton Abbey School

Good

The school supports pupils in understanding their local community and beyond.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXAMINATIONS 2023 – 24

In 2024 there were 1217 entries for RE GCSE in Merton, a rise of 12 from the previous year (rise of 28 the previous year). 68% of Year 11 pupils sat a GCSE in RE in Merton secondary schools: this is a fall from 87% in 2021-22 but in line with 2022-3 which was 70%. It should be noted that most Merton secondary schools are entering nearly all their pupils, not just those opting for RE. In 2024 approximately 33% of year 11s nationally took GCSE RE.

GCSEs are graded 9 -1 and Merton was above the national average for all higher grades, 9 - 6. Top grades of 8 and 9 rose in Merton. 69.1% achieved 5 and above against a national average of 61.5 %, this was also a rise from 67.4 last year and is 1.7% rise which greater than the 0.3% rise nationally. These results are

A level results for Philosophy and RE are small in number (28) so percentages are harder to compare. In 2022/3 we had 31 entries. This year we have seen a very slight fall. C and above levels in Philosophy were 57.2 (national 69.9) and RS were 66.7 (74.7 nationally) So A level results low in volume but appear to have lower outcomes too.

GCSE 2023-4**Religious Studies**

	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U
Number of Candidates	109	154	169	228	183	129	130	73	34	8
Merton %	8.9%	12.6%	13.9%	18.7%	15.0%	10.6%	10.7%	6.0%	2.8%	0.7%
National %	8.1%	10.8%	12.1%	16.5%	14.0%	10.5%	12.6%	8.0%	4.8%	

GCSE 2022-3**Religious Education**

	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U
Number of Candidates	98	155	173	231	154	112	147	90	38	7
Merton %	8.1%	12.9%	14.4%	19.2%	12.8%	9.3%	12.2%	7.5%	3.2%	0.6%
National %	7.7%	10.7%	12.1%	16.7%	14.0%	10.9%	13.8%	8.0%	4.4%	1.6%

A Level 2023-4**Logic/Philosophy**

	*	A	B	C	D	E
Number of Candidates	0	1	2	1	1	2
Merton %	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	28.6%

National %	3.8%	15.3%	25.4%	25.4%	16.1%	9.8%
------------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------

Religious Studies	*	A	B	C	D	E
--------------------------	---	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

Number of Candidates	1	2	8	3	4	3
----------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---

Merton %	4.8%	9.5%	38.1%	14.3%	19.0%	14.3%
----------	------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------

National %	4.4%	17.0%	28.1%	25.2%	15.8%	6.7%
------------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------

A Level 2022-3

Logic/Philosophy	*	A	B	C	D	E
-------------------------	---	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

Number of Candidates	0	2	5	3	3	3
----------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---

Merton %	0.0%	12.5%	31.3%	18.8%	18.8%	18.8%
----------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

National %	4.2%	13.5%	27.8%	24.8%	16.3%	9.6%
------------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------

Religious Education	*	A	B	C	D	E
----------------------------	---	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

Number of Candidates	1	4	5	2	1	2
----------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---

Merton %	6.7%	26.7%	33.3%	13.3%	6.7%	13.3%
----------	------	-------	-------	-------	------	-------

National %	4.3%	16.8%	29.3%	25.7%	14.9%	6.7%
------------	------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) FOR TEACHERS

Penny Smith-Orr has been commissioned again by the Local Authority to provide training sessions for RE Subject Leads. Three workshops were run during the year for Subject Leads. These covered elements of the syllabus and the role of Lead for RE in school. Numbers attending sessions were low, although slightly higher than in 2022/3 with 32 teachers' sessions attended in 2023/4 up from 26 in 2022/3. The feedback on the sessions continues to be very positive and we had the same pattern of attendance with more attendance in the autumn session.

Name of course	Date of course	Attended	Not attended	Cancelled
RE Subject Leaders - Autumn Term	10 October 2023	16	3	1
RE Subject Leaders - Spring Term	05 March 2024	9	4	2
RE Subject Leaders - Summer Term	07 May 2024	7	2	2

All evaluations of the sessions were good or outstanding.

COMPLAINTS CONCERNING RE

No complaints were received under Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988 regarding Religious Education in Merton schools.

FUNDING FOR MERTON SACRE

Merton SACRE meetings are supported by a paid Clerk and by a Local Authority officer, whose time is given in kind.

NASACRE membership is funded: annual NASACRE conference fees are also paid for, including transport expenses if needed.

The LA's annual contribution is £2000. In addition, the LA has led the 6th form Interfaith Dialogue project. SACRE members contribute by volunteering to run each session, which teachers attend. LA preparation and funding in kind equates to £1080.

The LA funds RE Subject Lead training sessions at an annual cost of £600.

The total LA spend on SACRE has remained at £3680: this figure has been constant for the last few years.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Determinations

There are no determinations in Merton.

GENERAL

Links with other agencies

Merton SACRE is a member of NASACRE, The National Association of SACREs, and a representative attends national meetings. Full reports are given at SACRE meetings so that all members are aware of current topics and issues. Members of SACRE are also representatives on the Merton Faith and Belief Forum and this facilitates communication between the two committees. A member of SACRE attended the NASACRE Annual General Meeting in Birmingham and reported back to SACRE.

List of organisations to which the SACRE report is sent

A copy of this report will be placed on the SACRE section of the Merton LA website and relevant officers will be informed.

www.merton.gov.uk/learning/schools/standing-advisory-council-on-religious-education.htm

NASACRE will also receive a copy.

Contacts

If you have any issues that you would like to raise with the Merton SACRE, please contact the Merton LA Advisor to the SACRE, Keith Shipman: keith.shipman@merton.gov.uk.

Appendix 1: SACRE Membership**STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)****MEMBERSHIP – between September 2023 and September 2024****Group A – Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs**

Buddhism	Kamontip Evans
Free Churches	Vacancy /Shelley Ward
Hinduism	Ms. G Maheshwaran
Humanism	John Carter
Islam	Mr Farrukh Ahmed
Judaism	Mr. Michael Freedman
Roman Catholic Church	<i>Vacancy</i>
Sikhism	<i>Vacancy</i>
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	Mr. Waleed Ahmad

Group B – Church of England

C of E	Vacancy / Fr David Pennels
C of E	Rev Andrew Williams / Vacancy
C of E	Ms Rachael Norman

Group C – Teacher Associations

NAHT/SHA	Ro Maybury
NASUWT	<i>Vacancy</i>
NEU	Debra Beale

Group D – Local Authority

Liberal Democrat Group	Cllr K Dresselaers
Labour Group	Cllr Usaama Kaweesa
Labour Group	Cllr L Attawar

Others

Co-opted member (Teacher)	Mr. D Kechagias
Local Authority Adviser	Mr. K Shipman
Clerk	Ms A Oliver