



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

**Annual Report
for 2022 – 2023**

July 2024

I am pleased to send you Merton SACRE's Annual Report for the academic year 2022-2023. Every SACRE is required to publish a report and to make it available to schools and the wider public.

The main focus for Merton SACRE over the last year has been to increase the direction of dialogue between teachers and SACRE members in the quality of RE in schools. This has been very successful. It is also for SACRE to be a catalyst of activity to improve dialogue and understanding through project work in schools.

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. As he was no longer Mayor, our previous Chair Cllr Mike Brunt returned to lead us through these discussions. However, he sadly had to stand down in the summer term.

Mayor Gill Manly also led a lovely goodbye to one of our longest-serving SACRE members, Saleem Sheikh, who had worked with the council and SACRE since 1971 (*below*). Saleem had represented Islam on the committee and had been Vice-chair. The reception took place in November 2023, which is outside the scope of this report, but we wanted to mark his leaving with thanks this year.

We hold our meetings in places of worship to highlight the opportunities to visit as part of the curriculum, but also to broaden members' knowledge of the faith and belief make-up of the Borough of Merton. We have also visited schools to hear about the excellent work they are doing so we can inform our members, fulfilling SACRE's role in supporting quality RE advice in the Borough.

Merton is a unique and religiously diverse community to grow up in. Our children need help to navigate this local as well as global world. This year we have continued to see the challenges of global terrorism and the parallel risk in stereotyping that RE as a subject, and RE teachers in particular, do so much to challenge. 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 presence in Merton.

Ms Geetha Maheshwaran

**Chair of Merton SACRE
July 2024**



SACRE MEETINGS

Cllr Brunt was re-elected Chair at the autumn meeting of SACRE. However, he had to stand down in the summer term: Geetha Maheshwaran (Hindu Representative) was elected 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. They were hosted at the Buddhapadipa Buddhist Temple, the Baitul Futuh Ahmadiyya Mosque and the Wimbledon Synagogue.

The key issues debated were:

- **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 19 Year 12 students from St Mark's Academy, Raynes Park High School, Rutlish School, Ricards Lodge, Ursuline High School and Wimbledon College. 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. SACRE members wanted to hear direct feedback from the students themselves, so in March, the end of the student workshop at the Ahmadiyya Mosque coincided with the start of the SACRE meeting. This led to an extremely rich discussion with the students, which continued among the SACRE members once the students had left for a tour of the Mosque. 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 programme and as a result of student requests, Buddhism had been added to the 2022-23 sessions, with Humanism added in 2023-24.



Sacre Members hearing directly from 6th form Interfaith Dialogue group at the Ahmadiyya Mosque, Morden





6th Form Interfaith Dialogue groups at the Buddhist Temple, Ahmadiyya Mosque, Wimbledon Synagogue, Hindu Temple and St Peter and Paul Church.

- Abbotsbury Primary School Faith Ambassadors** Inspired by the work of the 6th form project and a conference on Pupil Voice, Abbotsbury set up their own Year 6 project, in which pupils from a wide variety of faiths decided collectively on their roles as Faith Ambassadors. These children lead assemblies and create displays across the school so that all children from all faiths feel included in their school. The LA Lead for SACRE met the pupils, who were confident and passionate about their roles. SACRE members wanted other schools to be aware of this excellent project, so the pupil group were interviewed by the LA Lead live online as part the whole-borough Black Lives Matter and Racial Equality Schools forum. This presentation was very well received.
- 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 heard feedback from schools on how, for Interfaith Week, all the adults in one school – including catering staff – had been involved. They discussed which Academies were using the Merton Agreed RE Syllabus and were interested in how different schools in the same Academy chain might make different decisions. They also heard feedback on attendance at and input around the RE Subject Lead sessions run by the Local Authority.
- SACRE also discussed the Agreed RE Syllabus** at each session. The Syllabus should be renewed or refreshed every five years and a review was due. The national discussion on how to incorporate elements or completely rewrite the syllabus using worldviews was debated. It was noted that the Merton Syllabus is more an in-depth scheme of work than syllabi elsewhere. This had been a deliberate decision by a previous SACRE Syllabus conference, as few primary schools have trained and qualified RE teachers, so members wanted to support local teachers with a detailed syllabus, but also one that they felt accurately represented local faith and belief traditions. A survey was devised in summer 2023 to hear local teacher views on the Syllabus and any changes they felt were needed. The RE Subject Leads session was used to seek feedback from schools and an online survey form was sent out to all schools. Of 54 Merton Borough schools, 14 completed it. SACRE members agreed that the survey had raised awareness of the Syllabus with headteachers. Findings from the review were discussed in depth: however, decisions on next steps were left to the Autumn 2023 meeting to allow members time to consider detailed survey feedback. The discussion was informed by members’ attendance at the annual NASACRE conference and feedback to members on key points from these discussions.

A word cloud of the key word feedback on the Merton Agreed Syllabus



- **SACRE members are also committed to their own learning** about faith and belief as an example to the RE community. To that end, as part of SACRE meetings members had a guided tour of the Buddhist Temple and a fascinating discussion on Buddhist traditions. At Wimbledon Synagogue they also organised a teaching session on Judaism and timed their meeting so that the speaker, the National Education Officer from the Jewish Board of Deputies, could attend and lead an in-depth discussion on diversity within Judaism. This session was held at the Wimbledon Synagogue and was very well received.

SACRE aims going forward into 2023/24:

- **Respond to the schools survey and use to inform next steps with the Syllabus**
- **Develop the 6th form Interfaith Dialogue Group**
- **Seek feedback from schools on the quality of RE by visiting a secondary 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.

Wimbledon Park Primary School

Outstanding

“Staff encourage pupils to understand their responsibilities as productive citizens of the world. Through weekly assemblies and in lessons, pupils are taught about different cultures and communities. They learn about and celebrate the differences in all people.”

Park Primary School

Outstanding

“Pupils regularly visit museums, galleries, theatres and places of worship.”

Hatfield Primary School

Requires Improvement

“Pupils are helped to understand how families can be different in modern Britain. They are especially proud of how inclusive their school is. Pupils are welcoming and friendly. They celebrate each other’s differences.”

Harris Academy Wimbledon

Outstanding

“Pupils celebrate the diversity of their school. They told inspectors that everyone is treated fairly and equally.”

The Priory CE Primary School

Good

“The curriculum helps pupils to understand the importance of topics such as equality and diversity.”

Dundonald Primary School

Good

“Pupils respect and celebrate diversity in school. They also learn about these ideas through the curriculum.”

Gorringe Park Primary School

Good

“Pupils enjoy learning about people who are different from them. Promoting equality and celebrating diversity are threads that run through day-to-day school life.”

Hillcross Primary School

Good

“Ensuring that everyone feels valued and respected is taken very seriously here. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to enjoy high levels of success. Pupils who need additional help are supported with kindness and understanding by adults and their peers alike. Pupils are considerate and treat their peers with sensitivity. Pupils cooperate exceptionally well together.”

SS Peter & Paul RC Primary School

Good

St Mark's Academy

Good

“Pupils’ learning is supported by a wide range of outings and extra-curricular activities aimed at building their confidence, teamwork skills and positive attitudes. Leaders organise educational visits for all pupils, including to Southwark Cathedral.”

Cricket Green Special School

Outstanding

Abbotsbury Primary School

Good

“Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils’ wider personal development. They offer a wide range of activities to enrich pupils’ education. These include visits to various places of worship, such as a local mosque and synagogue. Pupils are taught about different religions, traditions, and festivals.”

Wimbledon College

Good

St Matthew's Primary School

Good

“Pupils discuss topical and moral issues regularly.”

Sacred Heart RC Primary School

Good

“Leaders promote pupils’ spiritual development very well. Staff teach pupils about the importance of caring about everyone. For instance, pupils are taught about different cultural celebrations, festivals and religions.”

Stanford Primary School

Requires Improvement

St John Fisher RC Primary School

Good

St Thomas of Canterbury RC School

Good

“Pupils are taught about the importance of treating everyone equally and with respect.”

Liberty Primary School

Good

“Pupils recognise and celebrate their rich and diverse community within an exceptionally strong culture of acceptance and respect. There are ample opportunities for pupils to develop their character, for example by taking on leadership responsibilities and raising money for charity. They regularly participate in community projects that bring pupils and their families together, such as the summer fair, and cultural and religious celebrations.”

The Sherwood School

Good

“Leaders foster a supportive and an inclusive school culture by setting up pupil leadership teams. For example, pupil ambassadors work together to educate others about their rights. This creates an environment that values and promotes respect for each pupil.”

RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXAMINATIONS 2022 – 23

In 2023 there were 1205 entries for RE GCSE in Merton, a rise of 28 from the previous year. 70% of Year 11 pupils sat a GCSE in RE in Merton secondary schools: this is a fall from 87% in 2021-22. It should be noted that most Merton secondary schools are entering nearly all their pupils, not just those opting for 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 fell in Merton and nationally.

A level results for Philosophy and RE are small in number so percentages are harder to compare. In some grades the Borough is higher, but in both GCSE and A level the number of students receiving E grade was above national average, which is not as strong. A level entries have risen, however, from 25 to 31.

GCSE

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

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 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. The feedback on the sessions was very positive but attendance numbers were quite low at two of the sessions, with 5 and 7 teachers respectively, as opposed to 14 for the first session. More staff had booked, but were unable to attend on the day.

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 is £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 2022 and September 2023****Group A – Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs**

Buddhism	Kamontip Evans
Free Churches	<i>Vacancy</i>
Hinduism	Ms. G Maheshwaran
Humanism	John Carter
Islam	Mr. S Sheikh
Judaism	Mr. M Freedman
Roman Catholic Church	<i>Vacancy</i>
Sikhism	Mr. A Singh Bahra
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	Mr. Waleed Ahmad

Group B – Church of England

C of E	Mrs Jane Savill
C of E	Rev Andrew Williams
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	Mr. D Kechagias
Local Authority Adviser	Mr. K Shipman
Clerk	Ms A Oliver