

Northamptonshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Annual Report September 2023- August 2024

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1.0 Introduction

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Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Foreword by Morcea Walker – Chair of Northamptonshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) – 2023 –2024

This was the period of time when COVID was a whispered word and things went back to “normal” in our schools and other educational establishments. The many people working in this field were able to continue to deliver good quality teaching to pupils.

SACRE had been without an Advisor since 2019 but during the academic year 2023 – 2024 Amy Crestanello was appointed into this position. This is a good opportunity, on behalf of the SACRE members, to welcome her to the organisation. She has already made an impact on the work of SACRE and we look forward to her continued support.

SACRE meetings followed Government guidelines and were mainly held face to face. Students have been able to take GCSE and A-levels in 2024. Additionally, visits to places of worship are gradually increasing.

The SACRE Advisor has also done a considerable amount of work with schools around developing the curriculum. SACRE members look forward to seeing how these are received and delivered in all our educational establishments.

SACRE continues to have the support of the Heads of School Effectiveness for both North and West Northamptonshire unitary authorities. The work of SACRE has been made easier by having joint meetings.

A huge “thank you” must go to the people who have been part of the Working Party. The group comprises of SACRE members supported by the Heads of School Effectiveness. This group has worked hard to redesign constitutions based on the 1996 Education Act, for each local authority.

SACRE members continue to look forward to understanding how RE is helping to encourage the positive development of young people. Also members wish to continue building on good working relationships with various Agencies and the wider community.

The Group wishes to thank Jane Hall our Administrator for all her support.

Morcea Walker MBE, DL
Chair Northamptonshire SACRE

1.2 Overview of SACRE meetings

SACRE met four times in the 2023-2024 academic year. Details of the priorities worked on during the year can be found in 6.3 Northamptonshire SACRE 2024-2027 Development Plan

1.3 Overview of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

The ASC met twice in the academic year 2023-2024. During these conferences the review of the agreed syllabus was overseen.

1.4 Executive Summary

The primary focus for the SACRE in 2023-2024 was the appointment of a SACRE advisor, who commenced their role in January 2024. The subsequent focus was to initiate the review of the agreed syllabus. A consultation process was conducted, gathering feedback from over 90 schools. This feedback, along with national developments in Religious Education (RE), has informed the ongoing review of the revised syllabus. SACRE, having agreed on the strategic direction for the updated syllabus, which includes units currently being drafted by the SACRE Advisor and a teacher working party. Additionally, a termly RE newsletter has been launched to enhance communication and engagement within the teachers of RE, as well as visits to several schools by the SACRE Advisor to gather feedback and provide guidance on RE.

Section 2 – Statutory RE in Northamptonshire

2.1 The Northamptonshire Locally Agreed Syllabus in Schools

The primary focus of the SACRE Advisor and the SACRE has been on conducting a thorough review of the locally agreed syllabus. This review draws on several key national guidance documents, including:

- "Deep and Meaningful? The Religious Education Subject Report" (Ofsted, 2024)
- "Ofsted Annual Report" (2023)
- "Religion and Worldviews in the Classroom: Developing a Worldviews Approach" (2024)
- "National Content Standard for Religious Education in England" (2023)

To gather feedback for this review, the SACRE Advisor conducted several school visits and organised two consultations in February 2024. The first consultation included a survey distributed to all schools in North and West Northamptonshire, garnering over 90 responses. The second survey aimed to collect insights from all SACRE members regarding the review process.

In April 2024, a teacher working group comprising over 30 members convened to create a draft curriculum map for Key Stages 1 to 3. This session was guided by national documentation and informed by insights gathered from the consultations.

Since May 2024, the SACRE Advisor, alongside teachers from the working group, has been actively developing and refining the units within the updated agreed syllabus.

In addition to this, a new termly RE newsletter launched in April 2024. This is disseminated through the head teacher newsletters at the beginning of each term containing information on the agreed syllabus review, teaching and learning in RE, teacher CPD, national news and guidance relating to RE. Ongoing communications with schools to support them in the teaching and learning of RE continue.

2.2 Monitoring the Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS)

An audit was carried out in January 2024 of Ofsted reports within North and West Northamptonshire to find out how RE is being judged by Ofsted across the county. Of 288 reports; 196 were analysed for comments on or relating to RE. 166 out of 196 had some sort of comment on or in relation to RE, British values, tolerance and/or spirituality.

Out of 20 outstanding judgements; 14 of them mentioned RE favourably, 2 were mentioned with regards to their capacity to improve. 4 had no mention of RE. Some schools may have had both positive and improvement comments.

Out of 144 good judgements; 75 of them mention RE favourably, 75 of them mention RE (or in some cases the curriculum more broadly) with regards to their capacity to improve. 18 had no mention of RE. Some schools may have had both positive and improvement comments.

Out of 20 requires improvement judgements; 8 of them mention RE favourably, 17 of them mention RE (or in some cases the curriculum more broadly) with regards to their capacity to improve. Some schools may have had both positive and improvement comments.

Here were some of the key words and terms use by Ofsted in relation to RE: spiritual development, tolerance, being prepared for the future in British society, British values and being prepared for life in modern Britain, visitors into schools to discuss their worldviews, displays, understanding of different faiths, having and embedding deep knowledge.

Some typical comments from Ofsted reports where RE is mentioned favourably;

- Pupils' personal development is embedded throughout the curriculum.
- Staff encourage pupils to respect others, irrespective of their background.
- Pupils show great interest in learning about different religions and cultures and what is happening the world.
- Leaders have designed a well-sequenced personal development programme. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Teachers use current affairs to help pupils learn about citizenship and democracy. Pupils discuss different views and beliefs.
- Pupils enjoy rich experiences of cultures and other faiths, including visits to a local mandir and mosque. These visits support pupils' knowledge and understanding of different faiths and cultures well.
- Leaders are ambitious that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about a wide range of cultures and faiths. They are clear that everyone is equal.

- Leaders have a firm commitment to preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. From the early years,
- Children learn about healthy relationships and friendships. Pupils learn about British values, diversity and inclusion.

Some typical comments from Ofsted reports where RE is mentioned with regards to their capacity to improve;

- Pupils cannot recall learning (in RE). For example, some pupils struggle to recall facts about different world faiths and beliefs.
- Pupils have some understanding of difference. They do not have a good enough understanding of religion and other cultures. Pupils know about some of the British values.
- Leaders, including subject leaders, have not ensured that all subjects are taught in all classes or that the delivery of the curriculum and its impact is effectively monitored. As a consequence, leaders do not have a precise understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in each subject.
- Subject leaders and teachers do not have enough subject knowledge.
- Lack knowledge of the British values and the protected characteristics. This means they are not as prepared as they need to be for life in modern Britain. Leaders need to consider their approach to personal development so that pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of British values and equality.
- Pupils are aware of fundamental British values, but not all are aware of the significance to themselves and the community. As a consequence, some pupils make inappropriate comments. Provision in school should place more importance on these values so they have greater prominence. This will help pupils recognise their importance and challenge others who do not respect these values.
- The curriculum does not support pupils well enough to learn about British values, cultures and faiths. Not all pupils can recall what they have been taught about the range of faiths and cultures in Britain. The school should refine the curriculum so that pupils deepen their knowledge about religious and non-religious traditions. They should check that pupils can explain the distinctive nature of fundamental British values and the contribution that they make to British society.
- The agreed syllabus has been monitored through the consultation sent to schools where information was collected on the strengths and areas of improvement. This enabled valuable insights into how the syllabus was used.

Feedback is also sought within discussions with individual schools.

These findings have been considered by the SACRE advisor to inform the development of the agreed syllabus and have proven valuable in offering advice and guidance to schools regarding the provision of RE.

2.3 Work of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

The ASC has convened twice in 2023-2024 to oversee the review of the agreed syllabus. The ASC has used national guidance as set out in 2.1, benchmarks from other locally agreed syllabi, feedback from the school consultation, and the work carried out by the teacher working party to guide them in agreeing on the strategic direction of the review.

2.4 Standards and Monitoring of RE in Schools

RE in schools is monitored through the following mechanisms:

- Conversations with schools
- Teacher Working Party
- Agreed Syllabus consultation results
- Ofsted report audit
- Feedback from LA School Improvement Partners (SIPS)

RE Key Stage 4 outcomes for 2021-2023

Accurate data is not currently available for the 2023-2024 academic year. This data will be provided in the 2024-2025 Annual Report and analysed in a forthcoming SACRE meeting.

Data has been collected from Nexus and Fisher Family Trust for this section. When reference is made to average point scores this refers to the average grade achieved.

Please see attached Appendix A to see a detailed breakdown of Key Stage 4 data for NNC (North Northamptonshire Council).

NNC Key Stage 4 analysis:

Attainment: In 2023, 72% of pupils who took Religious Studies GCSE achieved a grade 4 or above, down from 75% in 2022, yet still 1% higher than the national average. The average point scores in NNC have remained relatively consistent from 2021 to 2023. In 2021 and 2022, scores were slightly below the national average, in 2023 NNC is in line with the national average at 5.1.

Pupil Progress: The Family Fisher Trust has rated NNC as performing above the national average. Furthermore, pupil progress within the local authority has shown consistent improvement at all levels year after year.

In 2023, 662 pupils were entered into the GCSE Religious Studies, this compares to 688 pupils in 2022, and 403 in 2021.

It is important to consider that variations in the number of schools requiring Religious Studies as a compulsory GCSE in different local authorities may influence this comparison.

Religious Studies Key Stage 5 outcomes for 2023-2024

In 2024, 84.8% achieved grade C above, compared to 78.1% nationally. In 2023, 81.2% achieved grade C or above across North and West Northamptonshire, showing a 3.6% increase. Subject uptake of Religious Studies increased from 1.6% to 1.7% from 2023 to 2024, with 165 entrants in 2024. Compared nationally, this is 0.1% below the England average for subject uptake. In North and West Northamptonshire, Religious Studies was ranked as 17 in subject uptake (no change from 2023), whereas the national average is 15 (data collected from Map of A Level grade outcomes by county in England (ofqual.gov.uk) as of the 18/09/2024, Ofqual data presents West and North Northamptonshire combined as Northamptonshire).

2.5 Continuous Professional Development for RE Teachers and Advice for Schools

Training in schools will take place with the launch of the new syllabus in May 2025. Governor training was provided to governors by the SACRE Advisor in June 2024.

2.6 Withdrawals and complaints

There have been no reported withdrawals or complaints within this period to the SACRE.

2.7 Advice to the Local Authority

There has been no advice to the LA issued by SACRE during this period.

Section 3 - Collective Worship

3.1 Monitoring

SACRE has not received any complaints about Collective Worship.

3.2 Determinations

There have been no applications for determinations within this period.

Section 4 - Links with Other Bodies

4.1 National Bodies

Training has been delivered to the SACRE Advisor by RE Today and NASACRE.

4.2 Local Bodies

The SACRE Advisor has met with the representatives from Suffolk SACRE,

Warwickshire and Coventry SACRE, and Peterborough Diocese in order to carry out initial research for the agreed syllabus review.

The SACRE Advisor attended the launch event of the Peterborough Diocese syllabus.

Section 5 – Statutory Responsibilities: SACRE’s Own Arrangements

5.1 LA support for the SACRE

The LA supports the SACRE through providing:

- a clerk for every meeting
- a SACRE advisor.

5.2 Membership, Representation, Recruitment and attendance

Every local authority must convene a SACRE. The post of SACRE Advisor was appointed to and began in January 2024. Northamptonshire SACRE, which has met four times this year, comprises four statutory groups. Attendance at meetings has been good. SACRE continues to ensure the membership reflects the demographic, however there are some vacancies that need to be filled. Whilst we acknowledge that there are vacancies within SACRE, attempts have been made to approach members of different faiths to participate. We now await the results as groups/organisations select their representative.

The four groups that make up SACRE are as follows:

- Committee A - representatives of non-Anglican Christian denominations, other religions, and world-view communities;
- Committee B - representatives of the Church of England;
- Committee C - representatives of the teachers’ associations; Teachers, Teaching Assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants
- Committee D – Representatives of the local authority

Group A – Representative of other Christian denominations and other

Russell Attwood	Bahai Faith
Vacancy	Buddhism
Caroline Wallace	Humanist
Arthur Newbury	Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints
Bhupesh Parekh	Hinduism
Ishver Patel MBE	Hinduism
Daniel Tabor	Judaism
Morcea Walker MBE DL	United Reformed Church
Vacancy	Religious Society of Friends
Vacancy	Christian Orthodox
Harkirat Singh	Sikhi Faith

Vacancy
Vacancy

Islam Faith
Catholic Faith

Group B – Representative of the Church of England

Julie Barke Church of England
Oliver Coss Church of England
Charlotte Maloney Church of England

Group C – Representatives of the Teacher Associations

Jenny Dixon Primary Teacher Representative (NEU)
Sylvia Erskine Primary Supply Teacher (NEU)
Vacancy Special School Representative
Will Kneeshaw Secondary Teacher Representative (NASUWT)

Group D – Representatives of the Local Authority

Cllr Tom Partridge-Underwood LA (NNC)
Cllr Keith Holland-Delamere LA (WNC)
Cllr Mark Hughes LA (WNC)
Cllr Tim Allebone LA (NNC)

LA Officers: Jo Hutchinson NNC Council (NNC)
WNC Council Katie Morlidge (WNC)

SACRE Advisor: Amy Crestanello

Clerk to SACRE: Mrs Jane Hall

Attendance at SACRE meetings (2023-2024):

Date	Venue	Numbers in attendance from each group			
		Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
September 2023	OAS, Northampton	2/8	1/2	2/3	3/4
November 2023	OAS, Northampton	4/8	1/3	1/3	2/4
March 2024	OAS, Northampton	6/8	1/3	3/3	3/4
June 2024	Haylock House, Kettering	5/8	1/3	2/3	3/4

5.3 Finance Given to SACRE for its Work

NNC has provided a budget for the work of the SACRE during academic year 2023/2024. This has enabled the recruitment of the SACRE Advisor, training for the SACRE Advisor and organisation of the ASC.

5.4 Report of the SACRE Working Party 2022-2023

Background

The Education Act 1996 puts a statutory duty on every local authority to set up a SACRE for its area. The dissolution of Northamptonshire County Council into two independent local authorities meant that the then countywide SACRE would also have to split. The provisions of the Education Act 1996 then came into play to authorise the establishment of two new SACREs, one for NNC and one for WNC.

As an interim measure, both NNC and WNC agreed that the county SACRE would continue to meet as one until the new legal arrangements were in place. SACRE then set up a working party as empowered in the Act to manage the process of separation*

The steps taken so far by the working party are:

- A close examination of the then constitution and amendments were made.
- The revised constitution was then presented to the legal and financial departments of each LA and approved by them.
- It was presented to and approved by SACRE on 6th September 2023.
- It was then presented to the Executive Council of both local authorities and approved on 14th September 2023.

*Membership of the working party

Councillor T Allebone	North
Councillor T Partridge-Underwood	North
Councillor K Holland-Delamere	West
Jenny Dixon National Education Union	(NEU)
Jo Hutchinson Head of School Effectiveness	North
Katie Morlidge Head of School Effectiveness	West

The constitutions for NNC and WNC SACREs can be found in Appendices B and C.

Next steps for compliance with the Education Act 1996 are:

- To establish an administrative base in each LA.
- To recruit faith, no faith and world representatives from each LA area reflecting their diverse composition.
- To hold the first SACRE meeting in each LA area hosted by the Council.

Section 6 - Additional information

6.1 List of groups and agencies this report has been presented to:

- Northamptonshire SACRE
- Department for Education (DfE)
- NASACRE

A copy of this report will be made public on the NNC website.

6.2 List of acronyms and abbreviations

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

LA – Local Authority

LAS – Locally Agreed Syllabus

NASACRE – National Association of SACREs

RE – Religious Education

SACRE – Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

DfE – Department of Education

ASC – Agreed Syllabus Conference

WNC – West Northamptonshire Council

NNC – North Northamptonshire Council

6.3 Northamptonshire SACRE 2024-2027 Development Plan

Please see attached Appendix D.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this has been a productive year for the Northamptonshire SACRE. A new SACRE advisor has been in post as of January 2024, and the review of the agreed syllabus is currently underway, with an expected launch in May 2025. This review process has included a far-reaching consultation and has been actively involving local teachers in its design. A four-year development plan for the SACRE has also been developed this year to establish a clear focus for the SACRE's future direction.