

Medway Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual report for 2015/2016

1. Chair's introduction

I am pleased to introduce the Medway SACRE Annual Report for the financial year 2015/2016.

SACRE met three times during the year and the meetings were hosted by Rochester Cathedral and a local school. SACRE members also attended the NASACRE annual meeting in Birmingham. Set within the current challenging climate for religious education, Medway saw an increasing number of students sitting the GCSE examination in Religious Studies from 891 in 2013 to 1,666 in 2015 with the number obtaining A*/A grades remaining close to one quarter. The percentage of students gaining an A*/A grade at A level increased over this two year period.

SACRE has continued to offer through its Advisor free training for groups of schools and professional development for staff of both academy and local authority schools. Working with the Medway Teaching School Alliance (MTSA) the SACRE commissioned work with a local secondary RE Subject Leader to offer further support to secondary RE departments and subject leaders in primary schools . The Medway SACRE also continues to both promote, and support financially, the Kent and Medway RE Hub organised by Canterbury Christ Church University. Medway's first teacher to receive a Farmington Institute for Christian Studies Fellowship is now sharing best practice with primary RE subject leaders funded by Medway SACRE.

Regular contact has been maintained with all schools through the use of locally produced RE newsletters which are issued three times a year and there has been an increased take up of the free artefact resources collections that SACRE makes available.

SACRE's work is only made possible by the generous financial support of Medway Council who recognise the positive value that well-delivered and well-resourced religious education can bring to pupils.

SACRE continues to benefit from its partnership with the different faith groups on the SACRE and the Anglican Rochester diocesan board of education.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow members of SACRE who have given of their time voluntarily and ensured that Medway has had a strong, quorate Council at all its meetings. the professional support of our consultant, Ian Hartland a former HMI, is also gratefully acknowledged. SACRE remains committed to the delivery of first-class religious education in all the area's schools.

Cllr Trevor Clarke
Chairman of Medway SACRE

2. Advice to statutory bodies

- a) The SACRE has not offered any specific advice to the local authority.
- b) The SACRE has offered, and continues to offer, much advice to schools. This has been achieved by different means.
- The SACRE continues to publish (the first issue was in March 2013) separate primary and secondary newsletters, three times each year, usually in March, June/July and November. They contain local and national news relating to religious education, collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They also include reviews of books for teachers, national reports on religion, belief, RE and collective worship and other suitable resources such as DVDs and CDRoms. Examples of some resources reviewed are to be found in Appendix A on page. The newsletter is sent to all RE subject leaders in local authority and other schools, including academies, in the local area. It is also available on the SACRE section of the local authority's website. The following provides some examples of the information found in some newsletters:
 - the primary RE newsletter for November 2015 contained two book reviews, guidance about teaching related to the stories about the birth of Jesus of Nazareth and a reference to the value of the BBC Radio 4 series entitled *Beyond Belief*.
 - the secondary RE newsletter for November 2015 contained information about a recent EHRC report entitled *Religion or Belief in the workplace and service delivery*, the Westminster Faith Debates as well as two book reviews.
 - the primary RE newsletter for March 2016. contained guidance for teaching and learning about the Easter story in Christianity
 - the secondary RE newsletter for March 2016 contained reviews of major recent reports related to religion, belief and RE along with some examples of text from each of them. Specific details about these reports are listed on page 8.
 - The SACRE enables the RE consultant to undertake a full, day review of a school's provision for religious education and for collective worship when asked to do so by schools. This results in a brief written report which is sent solely to the school. SACRE members then receive an anonymised version of the report which enables them to gain an insight into the work of some individual schools. The SACRE does not charge schools for this service. An anonymised example of a recent report can be found in Appendix C on pages 10 and 11. Schools have responded positively to the advice and guidance they have received from the RE consultant.
 - The RE consultant also undertakes, when asked to do so by schools, shorter discussions (of around two hours) with RE subject leaders about their school's provision for religious education. This work does not usually result in a written report but may include follow up visits to check on developments. The SACRE does not charge schools for this service. Appendix C on page 12 provided an example of feedback provided following a lesson observation.

- The RE consultant provides advice via emails or the telephone to schools which make contact with him.
- The RE consultant provides short, twilight INSET to clusters of schools, although not to individual schools. The SACRE does not charge schools for this service.
- There is an increasing amount of information placed on the SACRE section of the local authority's website. This includes relevant publications from the Medway SACRE, including guidance on delivering the local Agreed syllabus, the primary and secondary newsletters, minutes of the SACRE meetings as well as relevant documents from bodies such as the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Religious Education Council.
- Although most local secondary schools, along with a few primary schools, have become academies the Medway SACRE provides advice and support to both types of school.

c) The SACRE has not offered any specific advice to the government or other statutory bodies.

3. Standards and quality of provision of RE

- a) Public examinations results. Medway saw an increasing number of students sitting the full course GCSE examination in Religious Studies from 891 in 2013 to 1,666 in 2015 with the number obtaining A*/A grades remaining close to one quarter. The percentage of students gaining an A*/A grade at A level increased over this two year period. See Section 7 and Appendix D on page 13 for more details.
- b) The SACRE does not regularly collect information about attainment in RE from its schools apart from the results of public examinations.
- c) The SACRE has only limited information about the quality of RE provision in schools in addition to the information about the outcomes of public examinations in secondary schools. The SACRE does not make local-authority-wide checks on the extent to which all schools comply fully with the legal requirements for RE. Information mostly comes from the visits made to a small number of schools each year by the RE consultant. Very little information is provided in current Ofsted reports about RE or collective worship in the local area. The SACRE believes that it is a matter of considerable regret that Ofsted no longer makes rigorous checks on the extent of compliance with statutory requirements for RE and collective worship when schools, especially secondary schools, are inspected.
- d) There have been no withdrawals from RE that have been brought to the attention of the Medway SACRE.
- e) There have been no complaints about RE that have been brought to the attention of the Medway SACRE.

4. The local Agreed Syllabus for RE

The Agreed Syllabus Conference has been convened but has not yet begun undertaking a full review of the current local agreed syllabus for RE which was issued in 2006. It has yet to be determined when a full review will take place.

5. Collective Worship

- a) The SACRE does not make local-authority-wide checks on the extent to which all schools comply fully with the legal requirements for collective worship. The SACRE thinks that Ofsted should do so during its inspection of schools.
- b) The SACRE has received no requests for a determination in the current year and none at all in previous years.
- c) There have been no complaints about collective worship that have been brought to the attention of the Medway SACRE.

6. Management of SACRE

Membership and training. All recent meetings of the SACRE have been quorate. Training has been mostly undertaken at the full SACRE meetings. This has included:

- a consideration of the information in the primary and secondary newsletters, with an opportunity to look at the resources that have been reviewed
- updates, for example, any key information from the Department for Education, the RE Council, NASACRE and AREIAC is provided by the RE consultant
- group activities which have included learning about aspects of different world religions.

Some members of the SACRE attended the annual NASCRE meeting and then fed back their experience at a full SACRE meeting.

7. SACRE meetings during the year 2015/2016

There were three meetings during the school year. The following text provides some information about the key matters considered at these three meetings. Details about members' attendance are to be found in Appendix B on page 8.

First full SACRE meeting on 11 June 2015

- This meeting took place at the premises of Rochester Cathedral.
- The SACRE meeting started at 4pm.
- The RE consultant gave his regular input on relevant local and national developments and on work he is undertaking for the SACRE and local schools.
 - He had produced a first draft of guidance for Medway schools on British values. SACRE members discussed the draft document and made comments on

it. A revised version would be presented at the next SACRE meeting. A final, agreed version will then be sent out to all local schools.

- A draft of the Medway SACRE's Annual Report was considered with checks on members' attendance at SACRE meetings.
 - The consultant also outlined work he was going to be undertaking with local schools which included a twilight training session on teaching about Christianity to a local cluster of primary schools and review of RE at a local secondary school.
 - One member raised a question about changes in methods of assessment and it was agreed that the consultant would write some guidance for schools.
- One teacher on the SACRE spoke about her work as a Farmington fellow when she undertook work on ways to raise the profile of RE in primary schools and at creative ways of teaching the subject.

Second full SACRE meeting on 19 November 2015

- This meeting took place at Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School.
- The SACRE meeting started at 4pm.
- A Chair and Vice Chair were elected.
- The RE consultant gave his regular input on relevant local and national developments and on other work he had been doing.
 - In-service training to a cluster of primary schools along with a review of RE in a school, mentioned at the last SACRE meeting, had been successfully undertaken.
 - The consultant referred to the content and book reviews in the primary and secondary newsletters, the Annual Report.
 - One member asked about GCSE examinations and it was agreed that the consultant would provide examples of the questions to be found in the revised GCSE specifications for Religious Studies at the next SACRE meeting
 - The consultant referred to the Medway guidance on British values which is to be sent out to schools. This work seeks to help schools to ensure that they are able to meet the new requirement in Ofsted inspections to check on a school's work in promoting these values.
- The SACRE member who had attended the annual NASACRE meeting on behalf of the Medway SACRE reported on the meeting, which had included a presentation by the Rt Hon Charles Clark a former education minister.
- The Chair made a number of points:
 - reference was made to the use by schools of the Medway Artefacts boxes.
 - in introducing a visitor from the Family Trust, an organisation working with schools at no charge to the schools, which delivers lessons related to aspects of Christianity.
- The teacher and (now SACRE member) spoke again about her work as a Farmington fellow and the work she is now undertaking promoting her ideas in other schools.
- Two SACRE members, one of whom is the Jewish representative on the SACRE and the other a member of the education staff at Rochester Cathedral, spoke about the

joint work they are undertaking so that schools could make a visit to the local synagogue and to Rochester cathedral on the same day.

- On member asked if there could be a moment of silence at the start of each SACRE meeting and it was agreed that this practice would be introduced at the next meeting.

Third full SACRE meeting on 10 March 2016

- This meeting took place at Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School.
- A moment of silence was observed.
- The RE consultant provided his usual overview of key developments both locally and nationally.
 - He had previously circulated information about a number of important recent reports on RE and collective worship and talked about the key points they had made. (These reports are listed later on page 8 and a short review of each of them was provided in the secondary newsletter of March 2016).
 - He explained the requirements for RE in schools designated as academies.
 - In response to questions about Ofsted inspections, he pointed out that there were few references to either RE or collective worship in most recent Ofsted reports on local schools.
 - He referred to the fact that the level descriptions used for assessments were now not part of National Curriculum requirements and stated that there is now some degree of variety as to how schools will assess attainment and progress and how they will report it. He was asked to produce some guidance for schools on assessment in RE.
 - Following a previous request for information the RE consultant provided examples of some new types of GCSE questions and a marking scheme. He also pointed out that there are concerns about the quality of marking of A level examination papers and about the consistency of judgements made when the guidance for marking states merely that *'any valid response is acceptable'*.
- The Chair of the SACRE:
 - sought a person to attend the next NASACRE meeting in May 2016
 - reported on his attendance at a sixth form conference at a local grammar school and that the Medway SACRE is providing financial support to enable schools to hold an RE day in their school
 - mentioned that a number of Medway SACRE's artefact boxes are currently being used by schools.
- A teacher on the SACRE talked about the support that was being provided to individual subject leaders in both primary and secondary schools through the Medway Teaching Schools Alliance (MTSA). The Medway SACRE provides funding to support this work.
- There was a report on work in RE in some local Roman Catholic schools.

8. Contribution of SACRE to the wider Local Authority agenda

- a) The SACRE produced guidance on the promotion of British values in schools through RE which will contribute to the government's Prevent agenda.

- b) Individual SACRE members have supported individual schools and inter-faith activities locally.

9. Summary

The Medway SACRE functions well and does as much as it can given a limited budget in providing advice, training and support to schools including local academies, in promoting effective RE and collective worship. The SACRE is not afraid to challenge schools to improve when necessary as the anonymised report in Appendix D demonstrates. The SACRE has good local links, for example, with Rochester Cathedral, the local Inter-Faith Network and with some local religious communities. The SACRE has a good national link with NASACRE. The SACRE is suitably supported by an RE consultant who is a subject specialist with experience in schools, higher education, a local authority and as an Ofsted inspector.

10. Membership of SACRE, local authority officers who attend, clerk and professional advice.

The Chair of the SACRE is a local councillor and the vice-chair is a member from Group A. The SACRE is supported by a clerk from the local authority and by an RE subject specialist who was formerly a county inspector for RE and one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. He is commissioned to provide around 15-20 days each year to support SACRE meetings, to write the newsletters and the annual report, to add information to the website and to provide advice and training to schools.

The SACRE usually meets three times each year and meetings are mostly held in schools or in rooms provided at different places of worship. The agenda, along with relevant attachments, are distributed to members a week before the meetings take place. At each meeting the RE consultant provides information about relevant local and national developments. The annual budget for the SACRE for 2015/2016 was £15,094.00

Appendix A

Some resources reviewed in recent editions of the Medway SACRE newsletters

Primary newsletters	Secondary newsletters
Oliver P (2010) <i>Teach Yourself World Faiths: An Introduction.</i> 240 pages, Hodder Education £9.99. ISBN 978-1-444-10513-1	The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) March 2015: <i>Religion or Belief in the workplace and service delivery</i>
Robinson TA & Rodrigues H (2006) <i>World Religions: SCM Core Text.</i> 339 pages. £25.00. ISBN 978 0334 040 149	<i>Collective worship and Religious Observance in Schools: an Evaluation of Law and Policy in the UK.</i> An AHRC Network Report. Eds Peter Cumper & Alison Mawhinney. November 2015. ISBN 1-84220-138-1
House of Commons Briefing Paper No. 07167, 4 January 2016, <i>Religious Education in Schools (England)</i> by Robert Lang	<i>RE for REal: the future of teaching and learning about religions and belief.</i> November 2015, Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw. Culham St Gabriels and Goldsmiths College, University of London.
	<i>Living with Difference: community, diversity and the common good.</i> Report of the commission on religion and belief in British public life. Chair: The Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss. December 2015. Published by The Woolf Institute, Cambridge.
	<i>A New Settlement: religions and belief in Schools.</i> Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead. Westminster Faith Debates, June 2015. See: www.faithdebates.org.uk
	High Court ruling from Mr Justice Warby, 25 November 2015 Case No: CO/2167/2015 (27 pages)

Appendix B

Figures for the attendance at SACRE meetings, by members of each of the four committees and others.

Membership	11 June 2015	19 November 2015	10 March 2016
Group A: Christians and other religions			
Christine Hughes	No	Yes	- NA
Margaret McDowall	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jhita Kulwant Singh	No	Yes	No
Faran Forghani	No	Yes	Yes
Gabriel Lancaster	Yes	- NA	-NA
Ade Mosuro	No	- NA	- NA
Stuart McLeod	No	No	No
Stephen Bello	Yes	Yes	Yes
Irina Fridman	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anne Keywood	- NA	Yes	Yes
Group B: Church of England			
Helen Bradshaw	Yes	Yes	Yes
Esther Cook	No	Yes	Yes
Virginia Corbyn	Yes	No	No
Helen Burn	- NA	Yes	yes
Group C: Teacher associations			
Sharon Smith	Yes	Yes	No
Margaret Kenny	No	No	NA
Carolyn Scott	Yes	Yes	Yes
Group D: Local authority			
Cllr Trevor Clarke	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cllr Rupert Turpin	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cllr Gloria Opara	No	Yes	Yes
Cllr Pat Cooper	Yes	Yes	Yes
Others			
Ian Hartland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marc Dermody	No	Yes	Yes
Kirsty Bottigliere	No	- NA	- NA
James Willis	NA	Yes	Yes

Appendix C

A Review of Religious Education (RE) in a Medway special school: exemplar report

The review involved:

- a review of RE documentation prior to the visit to the school
- conversations with the RE subject leader and the deputy headteacher
- the observation of a total of six RE lessons in all with the subject leader and a deputy headteacher followed by a discussion of the lessons seen.

RE documentation

The school sent out a copy of: the RE policy; the RE Subject Action Plan; the RE Coverage Plan and; an analysis of RE progress data.

- The RE policy, dated Autumn 2013, is mostly suitable and draws on guidance produced by the Medway SACRE. It includes most expected aspects but needs to add information about the parental right to withdraw a child from RE.
- The RE Subject Action Plan includes expected headings but could include more information about any continuities with the 2014/2015 plan. It is not yet fully up to date as there is no information about outcomes of the planned scrutiny of work due to take place on 24 September 2015.
- The RE Coverage Plan for the key stages is mostly suitable but some improvements are needed. The RE topics identified are not always as specific as they could be. For example, the topic *Indian Experience* refers as might be expected to Hinduism. However, the RE focus for the topic *Under The Sea* only refers to Myself and those around me, which is too vague. The plans for Key Stages 2 and 3 appear to be rather dated as they refer to CU And SU units which seem to relate to the Medway Agreed Syllabus produced in 2000. These kinds of references do not occur in the later and current 2006 Medway Agreed Syllabus. There are only a limited number of specific references to RE topics which renders it difficult to check on the range of subject content and matters of continuity and progression. Some documentation related to RE elements in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for post 16 is needed.
- The Analysis of RE progress data helpfully provides information over a three-year period. It identifies pupils in different groups such as PMLD, SLD and the more able SLD, as well as those in receipt of the pupil premium but does not include information related to gender and ethnicity. The analysis does not provide information as to how the data was gained such as references to the outcomes of lesson observations, scrutinies of pupils' work and checks on teachers' planning, assessments and record keeping.

The quality of teaching and learning in RE

The quality of all the lessons seen was discussed with the subject leader and the deputy headteachers who it was agreed would then feedback comments to the staff observed. The overall quality of teaching was good. There was some outstanding teaching seen and a little that required improvement. The strengths in the teaching which led to good or outstanding learning and progress were as follows.

- **The quality of lesson planning.** All lessons were well planned following a common format which sets out clear learning objectives, the activities to be undertaken by

different individuals, pairs and groups and expected outcomes. There was clear guidance provided for teaching assistants.

- **The quality of relationships.** Teachers and teaching assistants/additional adults demonstrated care, patience, sensitivity and skill in relating to pupils with a wide range of special educational needs. Adults know the individual pupils very well and tailor tasks and provide support accordingly. They make good use of praise and employ signing and other devices such as symbols alongside words when appropriate to seek to ensure communication is as effective as it can be.
- **Subject knowledge.** In the lessons observed there was work on Judaism and Christianity and the teachers demonstrated a good subject knowledge of the aspects of these religions being taught.
- **The use of resources.** In the best lessons, the teachers made use of a wide range of resources including the interactive whiteboard/TV screen, religious artefacts and other items which allowed pupils to respond using different senses. In a lesson on a Christian wedding pupils were able to use different senses, including seeing and hearing vows being exchanged and rings exchanged and trying on clothes such as a wedding dress and trying on rings.
- **Subject content.** Explicit religious elements are clearly evident with lessons on topics such as Moses, a Christian wedding, Jewish and Christian birth/joining ceremonies and the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- **The quality of learning.** The outcomes of lessons were clear in the planning and mostly good efforts were made for pupils to reinforce their learning within the lesson.
- **Pupils' responses.** Pupils often enjoyed their learning, for example, when as a stimulus on the story of Moses, the teacher led a song about the story at the start of the lesson. It was evident from pupils' responses such as smiles or laughter and movements that they very much enjoyed the activity.

Weaker features of the teaching which led to slower learning and progress.

- **The use of the teachers' voice.** Some teachers spoke too quickly and/or too loudly at the start of lessons which did not help pupils to settle into a suitably receptive frame of mind. Sometimes staff spoke unnecessarily loudly when working in groups or one-to-one with a pupils which impinged on the communication of staff with other pupils.
- **The use of resources.** Sometimes resources and stimuli, such as displaying photographs, were changed too quickly for pupils to have enough opportunities to seek process and respond to the stimuli. It sometimes occurred that too many stimuli were presented to pupils in too short a time.
- **Working in groups.** Pupils were usually quickly moved into groups or one-to-one work with an adult but sometimes this happened too quickly without staff making the most of the initial introduction to the whole class.
- **The use of music.** More use might be made of religious music with opportunities being created for pupils to simply listen to it, for example, hymns and worship songs used at a baptism or wedding.

Recommended resources

Brown E	1996	Religious Education for All	David Fulton
Krisman A	2008	Growing in RE	RE Today
O'Brien L	2002	Connecting with RE	Church House

Comments on a Religious Education (RE) lesson seen at a Girls' Grammar School in June 2015

The following comments are based on a single, hour-long observation of an RE lesson with a Year 8 class. Feedback was given to the member of staff observed. As Ofsted no longer grade lessons seen, the following points identify the strengths and suggested areas for development based on this observation.

Stronger features observed in the lesson

- Good lesson planning with clear objectives, instructions and suitable resources
- Good use of the interactive whiteboard (IWB) to show both slides with text and to show informative and stimulating clips of film
- Good relationships between staff and students with a purposeful atmosphere in the classroom.
- Students are treated with respect and their contributions are valued
- Students behave very well and all carry out set tasks as required
- Students willingly respond to questions asked by the teacher
- Students develop their skills in assessing other students' work
- Good opportunities for speaking and listening.

Weaker features observed which limit how rapidly students were able to make progress

- Too little effort made by the teacher to establish strong links with previous learning so that current learning can build securely on the earlier learning.
- Questioning was not consistently challenging or sufficiently probing. For example, in considering the value of CCTV in public places questions might be asked about whether this technology reduces crime and how we might know whether any reduction in crime figures was related to the use of CCTV.
- Limited responses from the teacher to some student contributions, with a few missed opportunities to respond to more perceptive and significant comments which demonstrated a depth of understanding. An example was the comment that, *'people should do the right thing because it is right'*. This comment could have been used by the teacher to move the lesson on to deeper questions about the motivation for being good.
- Too little time was provided for writing for more than a short period of time (6 minutes for the longest written task). To ask able students to simply, *'Record a sentence'* is too undemanding a task. There were too few opportunities for students to work and write by themselves for a sustained period.
- A missed opportunity to develop students' study skills by giving them some time to note down their thoughts and the contributions of others on the issues being considered.
- Limited opportunities for reading.

Appendix D: MEDWAY SCHOOLS EXAMINATION RESULTS DATA 2013-2015

These tables give (a) the number of candidates entered for GCSE and A level examinations from 2013 to 2015 and (b) the percentage of entrants achieving different grades.

2013

Key Stage	Subject	Entered	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4	Religious Studies GCSE	891	25.8%	74.7%	98.9%
	Religious Education	1183	21.3%	50.3%	92.2%
5	A Level	95	23.2%	76.8%	97.9%
	AS Level	172	22.7%	66.3%	92.4%

2014

Key Stage	Subject	Entered	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4	Religious Studies GCSE	1388	24.0%	66.8%	97.3%
	Religious Education	0			
5	A Level	130	22.3%	74.6%	99.2%
	AS Level	137	21.2%	58.4%	89.1%

Difference between 2014-2013 results

Key Stage	Subject	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4	Religious Studies GCSE	-1.8%	-7.9%	-1.6%
	Religious Education	-	-	-
5	A Level	-0.9%	-2.2%	1.3%
	AS Level	-1.5%	-7.9%	-3.3%

2015

Key Stage	Subject	Entered	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4	Religious Studies GCSE	1666	22.4%	66.2%	97.6%
	Religious Education	0			
5	A Level	95	28.4%	87.4%	100%
	AS Level	214	16.4%	53.3%	87.4%

Difference between 2015-2014 results

Key Stage	Subject	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4	Religious Studies GCSE	-1.6%	-0.6%	0.3%
	Religious Education	-	-	-
5	A Level	6.1%	12.8%	0.8%
	AS Level	-4.8%	-5.1%	-1.7%

Difference between 2013 and 2015 entrants and results

Key Stage	Subject	Entered	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
4 in 2013	Religious Studies GCSE	891	25.8%	74.7%	98.9%
4 in 2015	Religious Studies GCSE	1666	22.4%	66.2%	97.6%
5 in 2013	A Level	95	23.2%	76.8%	97.9%
5 in 2015	A Level	95	28.4%	87.4%	100%

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