

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 11 March 2021

By: The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE

Title: Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Purpose: To update Members on the role and work of the East Sussex SACRE

RECOMMENDATION:

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to comment on and note:

The work of SACRE in the implementation of the Local Agreed Syllabus, raising the profile and importance of religious education and supporting the high-quality teaching of Religious Education in East Sussex and academies.

1 Background

1.1 Since 1988 Local Authorities have had a statutory duty to establish a Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education. Further detail regarding the duties of SACRE and how it operates are set out below.

The duties of SACRE

1.2 It is the duty of SACRE to advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters relating to religious education, collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

1.3 It is the duty of the LA to provide a locally agreed syllabus for religious education which must be reviewed every five years. Religious Education is a statutory element of the curriculum for all pupils which is determined locally. Academies are not obliged to follow the agreed syllabus but must provide religious education that is compliant with legislation.

1.4 The Education Act 1996 requires SACRE each year to publish a report on the work of the board and standards in its schools and the actions taken during the year.

How SACRE works

1.5 SACRE meets each term and includes representatives from elected members who are appointed at the Annual Council meeting in May. Members places are currently allocated on a proportionate basis (3 Conservatives, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour).

1.6 SACRE currently has representatives from Christian denominations, including Orthodox, and other faith groups who represent the principal religions in the area. This includes the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Baha'i traditions. We also have a Humanist observer. There is a councillors group, a teachers group, a church of England group and a group for other religions and world views group that make up the total representation on SACRE.

1.7 SACRE also has a role in dealing with any complaints about the teaching of RE and a role for making determinations in relation to collective worship. Typically this would include a formal request from a school to allow collective worship to reflect the demographic of the school. For example, if a school had a population which was mainly Sikh they could apply for a determination for their collective worship to be aligned to the Sikh faith. East Sussex SACRE has not had any complaints or applications for determination this year.

1.8 The SACRE Budget allocated in 2020/21 was £7,500. This was supplemented by support for administration and by additional capacity for working with schools and SACRE funded by SLES (Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service). The budget funds a Religious Education specialist working with SACRE and with schools, network meetings for primary and secondary teachers' professional development and training costs. SACRE is directly funded by the Department for Education from the Central Schools Support Grant via East Sussex County Council.

2 Supporting Information

The National picture for RE

2.1 In 2018 the Core Report - A Commission on Religious Education was published. The main recommendation was that SACREs should be reconstituted as Local Area Networks for Religious Education and Worldviews. This was subsequently adopted as policy by the Religious Education Council. The Government has indicated it has no plans to legislate on this proposed change and so SACREs continue to operate under current legislation. There is, however, considerable research and debate on worldviews and how this might impact on SACREs and on curriculum.

Ofsted Inspections

2.2 Ofsted inspections have been suspended in the light of the global pandemic and as yet there is no date as to when these may fully resume. Ofsted has conducted a number of remote visits about how schools have responded to the current context. Following a visit, the school then receives a letter but there is no judgement on the quality of education or on subjects and the curriculum.

Religious education in East Sussex

2.3 Schools are required to publish curriculum overview statements on their websites and update them annually. Most schools publish an overview of the curriculum as a whole as well as subject overviews which gives an indication about how the statutory teaching of RE is being met.

2.4 In relation to pupil outcomes there is no data for RE GCSE at either a national or local level for 2020 and the same will be true for GCSE in summer 2021.

2.5 SACRE has continued to meet virtually over the course of the last year. We have established a schools working group led by Barry Blakelock, Principal at Rye College, with representation from primary and secondary schools both at headteacher and teacher level and geographically spread across the county. This has enabled positive and robust discussions on how SACRE can work more closely with schools and leaders to promote high quality teaching in RE.

2.6 Up until this academic year SACRE has been supported by Lilian Weatherly as the specialist adviser. Lilian has now left this role and as a result SACRE wishes to express its thanks for her hard work over many years. Claire Ramalli who is a teacher of Ethics and RE at Ratton School and is an SLE (Specialist Leader of Education) for RE has taken on the role of specialist adviser to SACRE. She is supported by Carrie Beech representing SLES (Standards and Learning Effectiveness) adding capacity to the work of SACRE.

2.7 Claire Rivers as a Teaching School Director and a previous headteacher of a diocesan school has also joined SACRE to support the links with the local teaching schools and networks. This has been another positive addition to our work.

2.8 SACRE is working with the East Sussex Teaching Schools Network and has been able to appoint a further primary and secondary SLE, taking it to 3 secondary and 1 primary RE SLE with possible further SLE appointments before the end of the academic year. Many schools do not have specialist RE teachers and the deployment of SLEs will enable specialist school to school support.

Networks and Professional Development

2.9 Regular network meetings are held for primary and secondary schools and have continued to run this year virtually. There has been positive engagement in the network meetings and these meetings have been used as a vehicle for delivering professional development.

2.10 The primary conference in October 2020 had 38 teachers attending and this has a follow up training planned for March with approaching 200 teachers already signed up to engage with this opportunity. The focus of the training, which was led by Lat Blaylock from RE Today was on Understanding Christianity. The next session will look at world religions and support teachers with enhancing their subject knowledge and ideas for the classroom.

2.11 The secondary network facilitated a training event, also with Lat Blaylock, in January 2021 with a focus on world religions covering Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. This had 12 teachers representing 9 schools and we are seeking to build on this first event and extend the reach to more schools. Lockdown in January impacted on attendance at this event as teachers were delivering live lessons online which meant that cover for lessons was not available and so some teachers had to withdraw from this training day. There will be follow up sessions in March and June planned as twilight sessions with a focus on subject knowledge support for secondary teachers.

2.12 Resources and materials from the training sessions have been shared with schools. SACRE has pages on Czone where schools can also access a wide range of materials and resources to support the curriculum.

2.13 The schools group, through a colleague at Beacon Community College, have started a twitter account to share ideas and link people across schools, both primary and secondary and we also now have a Google Drive for teachers to share their resources, which is beginning to be accessed and used more frequently.

Revising the Agreed Syllabus

2.14 The main task for SACRE in the coming months is the revision of the Local Agreed Syllabus. Feedback has been given through the schools working group and primary and secondary networks on our current syllabus. As a result, SACRE are exploring options for working in partnership with either another LA or with a national organisation, RE Today, with a view to adopting a framework that is already in existence and adapting it to our context. This will allow us to bring in external support and additional resources to help schools implement a revised curriculum from September 2022.

2.15 The process for review is underway and there are planned sessions for engaging teachers and leaders in focus groups to explore the options and feedback to SACRE in June 2021. This will enable final decisions and writing to be completed by the end of term 2 in 2021/22 academic year and publication and launch events to take place in spring 2022 to allow time for preparing for teaching the new agreed syllabus from September 2022.

School Visits

2.16 Due to the pandemic school visits have not been possible but we hope to be able to reinstate them as soon as is reasonable. What we have been able to do during this time is extend the reach and engagement with schools across the county through the virtual networks and through the work of the schools group. Anecdotally we are hearing that many schools have continued to deliver RE through remote working, and some have even managed to continue with assemblies and acts of worship using online tools to facilitate such events.

Links with other bodies

2.17 Cllr Roy Galley as Chair of SACRE is also on the Executive Board of NASACRE (National Association of School Advisory Councils for Religious Education). Carrie Beech (SLES) and Claire Ramalli (SACRE specialist adviser) attend the South-Central meetings of SACREs to share practice and learn from other SACREs and are now associate members or AREIAC (Association for Religious Education Inspectors Advisers and Consultants). The focus is on sharing and learning from practice elsewhere.

Governors

2.18 It is the intention of SACRE to be able to run some training for governors once the new Local Agreed Syllabus is in place. We also plan to encourage greater governor involvement and will seek a governor representative to join SACRE.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an annual report and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council.

3.2 The People Scrutiny Committee is asked to support SACRE in its ongoing work to seek improvements to Religious Education provision.

Councillor Roy Galley
Chair of SACRE