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## **1 Introduction**

Sunderland Council has statutory obligations relating to Religious Education in the City. This report summarises those statutory requirements and sets out key aspects of how they have been met in 2015, against a background of reduced funding and national challenges.

This annual report has been prepared by the Sunderland Council Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE). Members of SACRE are representative of churches and non-Christian faiths in the region, teachers associations and elected councillors. SACRE members donate their time and are not paid for their services.

Religious Education is required by law and also contributes to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. It provides a key context to develop young people's understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Legal requirement for Religious Education**

Every maintained school in England must provide a basic curriculum (RE, sex education and the National Curriculum). This includes provision for RE for all registered pupils at the school (including those in the sixth form), except for those withdrawn by their parents (or withdrawing themselves if they are aged 18 or over) in accordance with Schedule 19 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The key document in determining the teaching of RE is the locally agreed syllabus within the Local Authority (LA), although schools designated as having a religious character are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses.

### **2.2 Sunderland Council's Statutory Responsibilities**

#### **2.2.1 Establish a permanent standing advisory council on RE (SACRE)**

The Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to constitute a permanent Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The statutory functions of SACRE are to:

- a) Advise the local authority on matters connected with:
  - Religious Education given in accordance with an agreed syllabus; and
  - Religious worship in community schools and in foundation schools that do not have a religious foundation
- b) Carry out the functions conferred on them by section 394 (determination of cases in which requirement of Christian collective worship is not to apply).

### **2.2.2 Convene an occasional agreed syllabus conference (ASC)**

Every Local Authority must also establish an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review the Agreed Syllabus for RE adopted by the Local Authority.

### **2.2.3 Agreed Syllabus**

The Local Authority must institute a review of its agreed syllabus within five years of the last review, and subsequently every five years after the completion of each further review.

Local Authorities must ensure that the agreed syllabus for their area is consistent with Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996, which requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

### **2.2.4 Required membership of SACRE and ASC (Agreed Syllabus Conference)**

The ASC is a separate entity from SACRE but may have common membership. The Local Authority appoints representatives to each of four committees that make up the ASC and, in Sunderland's case, the ASC has the same membership as SACRE.

The four groups of SACRE (four statutory committees of ASC) are:

- A Christian churches (other than C of E) and other faiths
- B Church of England (C of E)
- C Teaching associations
- D Local Authority

The Local Authority must ensure that the composition of group A on SACRE and committee A on ASC is broadly representative of the proportionate strengths of the denominations and religions in the area.

The authority is also required to take all reasonable steps when appointing a person to be a member of a group on a SACRE or a committee of an ASC to represent a religion, denomination or association, to ensure the person appointed is representative of the religion, denomination or associations in question.

### **2.2.5 Funding and resources**

Local Authorities are required to fund and support a SACRE and ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to constitute or convene each of these bodies and to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

## **3 Monitoring of RE and collective worship**

In order to fulfil the responsibility to advise the Local Authority on matters to do with RE and collective worship, SACRE monitors by requesting information from the Local Authority (eg standards, information about monitoring visits undertaken by the Specialist Inspector (RE) or (carrying out their own survey work (eg through questionnaires).

### **3.1 Limitations in monitoring**

SACRE have noted that OFSTED no longer undertake any subject scrutiny visits in RE. In the past these were useful for analysing national issues of importance.

SACRE's capacity to conduct direct monitoring has always been limited and there is a need to consider how this activity will take place in the future given current budget pressures. There is no longer a pattern of local authority monitoring of RE in Sunderland schools. This has resulted in a gap in SACRE's knowledge of the status of RE in schools

### **3.2 Responses to request for information**

No direct requests to SACRE for information.

## **4 Advice and support for RE and collective worship**

Having recently been remodelled SACRE has not as yet monitored collective worship but is seeking appropriate ways to do this.

### **4.1 Secondary School RE Networks**

The advisory teacher working with SACRE has initiated links with all subject team leaders with responsibility for RE to facilitate network arrangements across the local authority.

During the academic year 2015/16 it is anticipated that secondary RE networks are fully embedded and good practice is shared between colleagues

### **4.2 Primary School RE networks and courses.**

In order to support primary RE subject leads, SACRE has provided the opportunity when requested to schemes of work.

### **4.3 External and specific support**

The Local Authority has commissioned support from a Head of Department from a Local Secondary academy. This colleague has been asked to provide some advice and guidance to schools within the Local Authority. In addition, SACRE has continued to work in partnership with Durham SACRE and the specialist Inspector for RE in providing support materials for schools.

## **5 Status of ASC and agreed syllabus review**

### **5.1 Launch in 2014**

The most recent Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Sunderland was agreed by an ASC with the same membership as SACRE and launched in June 2014.

The next review of the agreed syllabus must be carried out by 2019.

## **5.2 Status in 2015**

All Sunderland schools and academies have the opportunity to engage with, and in deed many do, to the agreed syllabus. Durham County Council's Specialist Inspector for RE, has continued to provide additional planning materials to support the delivery of the Agreed Syllabus. It is anticipated that further planning and resources will be produced as Sunderland continues to commission Durham County Council to do so.

The School Improvement Officer, on behalf of SACRE, has written to all Head Teachers to remind them of the statutory obligation to use the agreed syllabus for teaching of RE in community and voluntary controlled schools.

Academies were also informed of their statutory obligations in ensuring that they are compliant with their statutory responsibilities in terms of RE.

## **6 Local, national and emerging issues in RE**

SACRE has been carefully following national updates and developments in Religious Education. Members of SACRE received a summary of the report 'The Truth Unmasked'. This was produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education following an inquiry into resources and provision for teacher training in Religious Education.

Ofsted published its long report on Religious Education in October 2013 entitled, "Religious education: realising the potential". The report was based on finding from RE inspections in primary and secondary schools undertaken across the country between 2009 and 2012 (a report was published every three years). The report highlighted several areas of weakness, including the role Government has played in undermining RE, as well as poor subject knowledge and lack of understanding of purpose of RE amongst teachers

## **7 Management of SACRE, working in partnership**

### **7.1 SACRE membership and meetings**

SACRE met as planned in March, June and November 2015. All meetings take place in Sandhill Centre, in order to be visible to all and easy for members of the public to attend.

The membership of Sunderland Local Authority SACRE is listed in the Appendix. Membership in each of the four groups is inconsistent and as a result some meetings have been inquorate. SACRE has requested that the local authority supports them in identifying faith/community leaders to support their membership.

### **7.2 SACRE funding and support**

September 2014 Sunderland LA has not reduced the SACRE budget and made a commitment to funding support from Specialist Led teacher of a local academy and support from Durham LA.

SACRE has made a commitment to use funding to provide bursaries to support the development of RE in schools.

SACRE has been well supported by the clerk to SACRE, provided by Law and Governance Team.

### **7.3 External relationships and activities**

SACRE continues to work with local partners and stakeholders.

SACRE has continued to work in partnership with Durham SACRE and the specialist Inspector for RE in providing support materials for schools.

The advisory teacher working with SACRE is a member of The North East Religious Learning Resources Centre (NERLRC). The Director of NERLRC has provided input to network meetings.

Sunderland SACRE is a member of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).

## Appendix – SACRE Membership 2014

Group	Representing
A	Christian churches (other than C of E) and other faiths.
B	Church of England (C of E)
C	Teaching Associations
D	Local Authority

Name	Representing	Group
		A
		C
		A
		C
		A
		D
		A
		B
		C
		B
		D
		B
		A
		A
		A
		D
		B
		A
		C
		B
		C
		A
		A
		A
		B
		A
		A
		D
		A
		C

Specialist Inspector for Religious Education -  
 Representative from Community Development -

### Vacancies in 2014

Group	Representing
A	United Reformed Church (1), Islam (1) – vacancy filled in 2015.
C	NASUWT (1), NAHT (1)