
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 the academic year September 2020- July 2021.

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.

The Chair of SACRE Comment

The academic year 2020/21 was difficult for all members with disruption to face to face meetings. We found that online meetings despite their negative aspects were better attended and we intend to explore how we can ensure that future meetings are quorate.

The annual meeting of the Council introduced four new members to Sunderland SACRE some with previous experience. A very warm welcome too Cllrs Dodds, McKeith, Samuels and P. Smith. Valerie Blackett also joined us to provide insights from a humanist perspective.

At the end of the year we were saddened to receive notification of retirement from Rev Stuart Bain. Stuart had supported Sunderland SACRE very ably over recent years both his experience and expert knowledge will be greatly missed.

An Agreed Syllabus Conference got underway during the year, culminating in a completely new approach to RE teaching for Sunderland schools who wish to take on board the new syllabus. I intend that we build on the strong response to the new syllabus to create a supportive network for teachers of RE in Sunderland.

May I take this opportunity to thank all members of Sunderland SACRE for their support and wise counsel. I particularly wish to lay on record my thanks to Cathryn Forbes our adviser and Paul Wood our clerk as Sunderland SACRE would not function without their very able and dedicated service.

1 Meetings

This Academic year saw a great deal of disruption to our meetings with October meeting being cancelled. We met in January and were quorate. Due to elections and The Council business being in purdah meetings did not take place and the June meeting was cancelled.

ASC meetings took place in both January and March and approved approaching RE Today to provide a new Agreed Syllabus for Sunderland.

2 RE (Statutory Responsibilities)

2.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in schools

The academic year 2020-21 saw the current Sunderland Agreed Syllabus ready for review. The current syllabus had been adopted by all schools in the LA. The profile of schools in Sunderland has changed since the existing syllabus had been produced and launched. In particular, most Secondary schools in the LA are now academies and some primaries are members of MATS.

Sacre approved the convening of an ASC in January 2020. However, the work for the group did not commence until 2021. The ASC met in accordance with the regulations and comprised all SACRE members and some co-opted teacher representatives who had expressed an interest in becoming involved in the process following requests for volunteers. The ASC explored several Agreed Syllabus provided by SACRE's in areas with similar demographics to the city. Presentations were then sort from two providers who we felt were of most interest in meeting our needs. The March meeting of the ASC voted to approach RE Today to work with us in using their Syllabus B as a template for our New Agreed Syllabus.

2.2 Training, Monitoring and Other Information

Through Together for Children channels the RE advisor for SACRE provides training to schools. Training provided was virtual and as follows:

- Primary Twilight Teaching Christianity
- Half day 'What makes an effective Primary RE Lead
- Primary Twilight Teaching Islam
- Half day 'Implementation and Impact of Primary RE
- Primary Twilight Creating Communities of Enquiry
- Half day 'How to monitor progress in RE'

These courses are well received and have good attendance. They also provide opportunities to discuss national RE trends and discussions. As well as feedback on what further support teachers require.

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.

In preparation for the new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus a questionnaire was distributed to all schools asking what they liked about the current scheme and what they would like to change or improve.

SACRE provides a termly newsletter to all schools. Topics covered included:

Autumn 2020:

- New Syllabus update
- interfaith bursaries that had been awarded
- Primary 100 RE resources
- Archbishop of York YAA.

Spring 2021:

- New Syllabus Update
- Spirited Arts Competition
- Focus on the North East Religious Resources Centre.

Summer 2021:

- New Syllabus update
- Ofsted May 2021 report
- World Religions v World reviews discussion
- Spirited Arts

Each newsletter always includes CPD that is being provided and the following paragraph encouraging schools to get in touch:

“AND FINALLY...All of us involved in teaching RE are acutely aware of the number of demands we face and how busy life gets! But we want to keep the work of SACRE relevant to everyone and to take every chance to share experiences (good and less so), as well as to celebrate your hard-won successes as widely as possible. So, even though we know it takes time and even though we know how hard you're all already working, PLEASE do keep in touch! Let us know what you have found particularly useful of what we are sharing and what you have been doing that might helpfully be shared with others. You can always reach us by emailing [...] We are REALLY looking forward to your feedback and news (so get emailing!). “

Any queries about the provision of RE in schools and resources to support that are responded to by the RE advisor to SACRE who works on a non-contractual basis. In addition, RE specialist advisor supports SACRE by attending meetings, reviewing

policy documents and keeping the SACRE apprised of local and national RE issues. As well as when requested facilitating training and providing advice and guidance to schools within the Local Authority.

3 Collective worship

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

4. Links with other bodies

Sunderland SACRE is a member of NASACRE and uses their briefings for discussion at meetings.

5. SACRE local involvement

The local Dioceses has members on the Sunderland SACRE.

6. Management of SACRE, working in partnership

6.1 SACRE membership

The membership of Sunderland Local Authority SACRE as of 22nd March, 2022 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.

6.2 Training for SACRE members

Members have made use of the training materials offered by NASACRE.

6.3 SACRE funding and support

Sunderland LA has not reduced the SACRE budget and made a commitment to funding support for the Specialist RE advisor.

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.