
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 2022-July 2023.

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 other religious traditions 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 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 year 2022-23 has been a productive one for Sunderland SACRE with the further embedding of the Agreed Syllabus, ably supported by our RE consultant, Cathryn Forbes, through professional advice and training sessions for teachers. We note the farewell of Councillor Louise Farthing who has stepped down from chairing SACRE this year, a position which she has held since 2016; we thank her for her service to SACRE and wish her well in her retirement. I take over the role from Councillor Farthing and look forward to working with our dedicated members in this new role.

Quoracy remains a challenge, particularly within Group C. We are keen to amplify teachers' voices and working on supporting membership and attendance for this group will be a priority in the coming year. However, we welcomed a dedicated new member to Group C this year and have been delighted with the positive contribution they have brought. Membership in Group D has remained fairly consistent but we also said goodbye to Councillor McKeith this year. We have also welcomed two new members to Group B, as well as welcoming several new members to Group A which has increased the diversity of SACRE membership and enabled us to be more representative of the community that we serve. For the first time in many years, we now have representation from a number of religious traditions other than Christianity (as well as broadening our Christian representation) which we are delighted about. A special thanks must go to our clerk, Paul Wood, for all of his efforts in recruiting new members.

To function effectively, SACRE relies on the contributions of its members and officers. I would like to thank our members for their commitment this year, as well as expressing our gratitude to the dedication of our clerk, Paul Wood, our local authority officer, Richard Cullen, and our specialist adviser, Cathryn Forbes, who all serve SACRE so well and are key to its success. I am looking forward to my new role as Chair, serving alongside our new Vice-

Chair, Amy Clarke, and working together with our committed members to strengthen the work of SACRE even further in the coming year.

1 Meetings

This academic year saw 'in person' meetings, taking place on 12.10.22, 21.03.23 & 20.06.23.

We have seen our membership increase with members of the Jewish and Muslim faith joining us, alongside a member of the Methodist Church. We also recruited to the teachers' group which has meant we have been quorate.

Our existing chair retired at the March meeting and in June a new Chair and Vice-Chair were elected.

We carried out a survey of SACRE members in early 2023. This was, in part, to help maximise the opportunity for meetings to be quorate. Members were asked about their preference for time, place, and day of SACRE meetings. In addition, we took the opportunity to ask members: in which areas of SACRE work they wished to be more involved; how often they used NASACRE resources; and the areas of work they would most wish to see Sunderland SACRE develop.

The development areas highlighted by members and the use of the NASACRE SEF tool saw us in June begin to formulate a three year action plan for Sunderland SACRE.

2 RE (Statutory Responsibilities)

2.1 Local Agreed Syllabus and RE in schools

The academic year 2022-23 saw SACRE provide a free day of training on the 21st September for teachers to support the implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus. The day was led by Lat Blaylock of RE Today as we are using their Syllabus B for the Sunderland Agreed Syllabus.

The event saw 63 schools take part in a day that was inspirational and full of practical activities to use in the classroom. The event provided an excellent platform for teachers to further enhance the skills and knowledge to implement the new syllabus fully within their schools.

Schools have been able to download all the resources from the day and take advantage of discounts to purchase additional support materials to facilitate their delivery of the Agreed Syllabus.

Following our full day conference, there have been four further half-day training sessions (details in 2.2).

Teachers completed a questionnaire at the end of the autumn term on their experience of working with the Sunderland Agreed Syllabus.

Over a third of schools responded and we were very pleased that over 80% of schools that responded are currently using the syllabus.

When asked about **attendance at the training** that has been provided 28 of the responding schools had attended both the launch and the one-day conference and 46% of respondents had attended all training offered. The following are some of the comments made about the training:

“All training has been exceptional. Very informative and helpful.”

“The SACRE Conference was a fantastic event which should be an annual event so that RE Leads and Senior Leader can network and improve the teaching and learning of RE.”

Teachers were asked to **detail the positive aspects** of the new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus. The areas most frequently commented on included: Clear vision; clarity of outcomes; clear progression; easy to use; and greater depth. One respondent commented: *“It fits in with our other curriculum subjects with its spiral curriculum and its aim of digging deeper. Its intention is clear. Staff have found it clear to use and outcomes are clearly matched to the key questions.”*

Teachers were asked to outline any **challenging aspects** of the new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus. The two biggest issues were: covering knowledge gaps when introducing a new syllabus across all year groups; and resourcing lessons.

Teachers were asked to share something **they felt proud** of having used the new syllabus. These are some of the comments:

“In the dinner hall two children from Year 2 turned to the deputy head teacher and asked her if teachers could see everything, and when she replied that nobody can see everything one boy replied well God can. The other little boy disagreed politely and they started to debate whether God was all knowing. Two year 2 children having a philosophical discussion while eating their lunch because of their new thought provoking RE curriculum.”

“The children are enjoying the Big Question aspect of the lesson plans - not only is it a key way to assess their knowledge of what has been taught but also a good review for them and a great way to get children to discuss certain aspects of the religion taught so far.”

Teachers identified a number of areas that would help with the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. These included: Assessment; support with G&T; sharing resources on some sort of central hub; lesson resources; and more training on the teaching of Islam.

SACRE concluded that it is evident from the schools that responded to the survey that the new Sunderland Agreed Syllabus is viewed positively. Teachers in Sunderland schools are working hard to implement the new syllabus and feel that children are benefitting from a more challenging RE curriculum.

Teachers have overall taken advantage of training offered and particularly value the One-day conferences delivered by Lat.

A focus on developing assessment models and challenging all children would further enhance the delivery of the new syllabus.

2.2 Training, Monitoring and Other Information

Through Together for Children, the RE advisor for SACRE provides training to schools. To support the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus, the following courses were delivered:

- 14th November 2023: Approaching how to teach non-Christian faiths.
- 6th February 2023 1.15-3.15pm Communities of Enquiry and delivering quality RE
- 2nd May 2023 1.15-3.15pm Working with the thematic units from Sunderland's Agreed Syllabus for RE
- 19th June 2023 1.15-3.15pm Looking back and looking forward: Lessons and strategies from working with The Sunderland Agreed Syllabus for RE.

These courses are well received and have good attendance. The courses saw the inclusion of a networking session with participants being asked to bring examples of students' work and resources they had developed using the new Agreed Syllabus. This worked well and is to be a regular feature. The training also provides opportunities to discuss national RE trends and topics, as well as to explore further support teachers may 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. SACRE will note any mentions of RE in OFSTED reports, particularly any 'deep dives' that are carried out in RE.

SACRE has looked at the preliminary findings of the RE GCSE

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

January 2023:

- New Agreed Syllabus
- Spotlight on the North East Religious Resource Centre
- SACRE survey
- RE CPD
- Sunderland Inter Faith Forum and resources

March 2023:

- New Agreed Syllabus and what you have to say.
- News from the North East Religious Resource Centre
- RE CPD
- What is going on in Sunderland this spring?

Summer 2023:

- RE Hub
- RE CPD
- What is going on in Sunderland this Summer and coming up in the Autumn?
- Spirited Arts Competition
- Archbishop of York Youth Trust - Young Leaders Awards

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, the RE specialist advisor supports SACRE by attending meetings, reviewing policy documents and keeping the SACRE appraised 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. A working party was created in June 2023 to begin the work on this area.

4. Links with other bodies

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

SACRE members have also been involved in the focus groups run by 'The Faith and Belief Forum' discussing 'Religions and Worldviews'. The discussions from the focus groups have been part of the research in creating the 'Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity' Insights Report.

5. SACRE local involvement

Both local Christian Dioceses have members on the Sunderland SACRE.

6. Management of SACRE, working in partnership

6.1 SACRE membership

The membership of Sunderland Local Authority SACRE is listed in the Appendix. Membership has increased across the four 'committees' (though the committees remain unbalanced),

resulting in more meetings being quorate. SACRE continues to work with the local authority in identifying faith/community leaders to continue to expand membership.

6.2 Training for SACRE members

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

Several members have also taken part in the full training day on the new Agreed Syllabus offered to teacher.

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 CPD to support the development of RE in schools.

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