

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE THURROCK STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) FOR 2020 – 2021



This artwork by David O (Quarry Hill Academy Key Stage 2) was inspired by Psalm 19:1

“The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

David was one of the prize winners in the Thurrock Spirited Arts Competition.

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Introduction

Since 1988, it has been a requirement that every local authority (LA) has a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

Though legislation sets out both the structure and the remit of a local SACRE - principally, overseeing religious education (RE) and collective worship - in practice every SACRE has developed its own particular style and character.

Thurrock SACRE has over the years developed its own particular style and character as this report will testify.

It is a legislative requirement that each SACRE produces an annual report of its work and that this is published, sent to the local authority, to local schools and to other interested parties. One important element of the report is performance data and an analysis of the extent to which schools are meeting their legal duties in relation to RE. GCSE data, including the short course was not available until this month, hence the delay in the publication of the report. More recently, other datasets have been made available by the DfE, most significantly the school workforce data that supports the monitoring of the level of provision in secondary schools.

Foreword by the Chair of SACRE – Mr Phil Anderson

It would be hard to think of any aspect of life in Thurrock that has not been touched by the COVID pandemic this year, and SACRE has been no exception. I must start by paying tribute to the parents, teachers, and support staff who have carried on the vital work of educating our children under the most incredibly challenging circumstances. Whether it is parents juggling with home education or teachers adapting to delivering remote learning or classroom lessons under rapidly changing restrictions, the creativity and resilience shown has been truly remarkable.

The pandemic has meant that SACRE has needed to adapt too. Our work has moved online, which can be technically challenging and takes away some of the face-to-face relationships which we all value. It has however made participation simpler and our meetings have been well-attended (and consistently quorate) throughout. We were sadly unable to run the annual youth RE conference this year, but the Spirited Arts competition which challenged young people in Thurrock to engage creatively with topics of religion and belief through visual arts was a great success. You can see one of the winning entries on the front cover of this report.

A key task of SACRE is to monitor the provision of high-quality religious education in Thurrock, and this has revealed both causes for celebration and real challenges. When given the opportunity Thurrock pupils perform well at GCSE level; close to national average and slightly better than in other subjects. But the numbers show that not all of our young people are receiving this opportunity, with exam entries in the bottom 20% nationally and school data suggesting that the subject may not be receiving the time it deserves or legally requires. These facts were backed up by the comments of the Thurrock Youth cabinet, who affirmed that RE gave them valuable skills in debating issues and understanding other points of view, but felt that the subject did not always seem to be valued by schools or accurately reflect their own experiences of faith. National evidence clearly shows that schools that emphasise RE do well in other subject areas too, and SACRE have again advised that the Schools Effectiveness Team should specifically review RE provision as part of their annual conversations with schools.

On a personal note I would like to thank the members of SACRE not only for the time which they give voluntarily, but also for the open and respectful attitude that they always bring to our discussions. It can sometimes feel that 'equality and diversity' actually means demanding that everyone conforms to quite a narrow set of views on controversial issues. As a multi-faith body we start from the perspective that there will be passionately held issues of belief on which we will probably never agree, but we are all committed to working towards understanding difference and seeking the common good in the interests of the next generation. This diversity of thought and opinion is something to be valued rather than suppressed or feared, and I am happy to hold up my colleagues as a positive example of what can be achieved in this regard.

Wishing you peace and blessing for the year to come.

Phil Anderson



Phil Anderson
Chair of Thurrock SACRE

Membership of Thurrock Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education 2020-2021						
Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reprs	Names of Reprs.	Date Appointed	Date due for re-election
A	Christian Denominations & other RE Denominations		9			
A	Free Church Christian	Free Church Federal Council	2	Mrs S Lawson	June 2019	May 2023
A	Roman Catholic	Diocese of Brentwood	1	Miss R Saul	June 2019	June 2023
A	Muslim	Thurrock Islamic Education & Cultural Association	2	Mr J Hussein	October 2019	September 2023
A	Sikh	Local Sikh Guru Gudwara Committee.	1	Ms H Kaur Takhtar	May 2018	June 2022
A	Pentecostal		1	Mr T Ojetola	July 2018	June 2022
A	Buddhist	Buddhist Society	1	Mr A Kariyawasam	June 2019	May 2023
A	Jewish	Board of Deputies of British Jews	1	Ms S Perlmutter	June 2019	May 2023
A	Hindu	Vacancy	1	Vacancy	Vacancy	Vacancy
A	Free Church Christian	Free Church Federal Council	2	1 Vacancy	1 Vacancy	1 Vacancy

Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.	Date Appointed	Date due for re-election
B	Church of England		4			
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Mr P Anderson	June 2019	May 2023
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Mrs L Fry	March 2020	March 2024
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Lola Olajide	June 2020	June 2024
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Vacancy	Vacancy	Vacancy

Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.	Date Appointed	Date due for re-election
C	Teachers' Associations (pref. Primary, Secondary & Special Schools)		6			
C	Teachers' Associations, Primary	Professional Associations Group		Ms H Martins	May 2018	June 2022
C	Teachers' Associations, Secondary	Professional Associations Group		Ms J Culloty	May 2018	June 2022
C	Teachers' Associations Secondary	Professional Associations Group		Ms A Jellicoe	March 2020	March 2024
C	Teachers' Associations	Professional Associations Group		Mrs C Pumfrey	May 2020	May 2024

C	Teachers' Associations	Professional Associations Group		Ms D Webster	May 2020	May 2024
C	Teachers' Associations	Professional Associations Group		Vacancy	Vacancy	Vacancy

Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.	Date Appointed	Date due for re-election
D	Local Education Authority		3			
D	Local Education Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor M Kerin	May 2018	May 2022
D	Local Education Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor G Collins	May 2019	May 2023
D	Local Education Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor J Thandi	July 2021	July 2025

Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.	Date Appointed	Date due for re-election
(non-voting)	Co-opted Member		1			
	Vacancy	SACRE		Vacancy	Vacancy	Vacancy

SACRE Meetings Held

The following SACRE meetings were held during the reporting period:

4th November 2020

6th January 2021

16th June 2021

All meetings were held remotely on Microsoft Teams and were quorate.

Membership and attendance

SACRE are pleased to report that attendance at SACRE has improved during the pandemic. It appears that remote meetings are easier for people to attend than face to face. SACRE have agreed to continue remote meetings for the foreseeable future.

ADVICE:

SACRE wishes to thank officers for their support in ensuring places on all four committees of SACRE are filled.

Work Plan 2020-21

The work plan for 2020-2021 is reported as appendix A

Monitoring and Evaluation

Standards in Thurrock Schools.

SACRE undertakes a number of activities annually to fulfil its responsibilities including the monitoring of:

School websites

Schools are required to publish their curriculum for each subject for each school year. This includes Religious Education, even when it is called something else. SACRE investigated school websites in order to learn more about how RE, including the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus was being used. Some schools presented a comprehensive RE programme and were clearly using the Agreed Syllabus and accompanying scheme of work. Others failed to report on RE or reported a curriculum that did not appear to comply either with the Agreed Syllabus or, in the case of some academies, their funding agreement.

School Workforce Data (Secondary)

Schools complete the school workforce census every November and this allows SACRE to discuss the number of teaching hours each secondary school reports for RE. Unfortunately, not all schools appear to complete the census accurately,

especially when the subject is combined with another on the timetable. SACRE has taken steps to encourage schools to report their provision for RE accurately.

Appendix B below sets out the data schools reported to the Department for Education.

GCSE Entries and Results

The Thurrock Agreed Syllabus requires that all students in all schools follow a course in Religious Education leading to a GCSE qualification. The publication of results therefore is another tool that helps us monitor levels and quality of provision. However, the DfE made a decision in the summer of 2020 that because qualifications such as GCSE and A were awarded based on school assessment, it would not be reasonable to use them in national performance tables.

SACRE noted that 74% of Thurrock children entered for GCSE RS were achieving a grade of 9-4, the national average was 78%. This means when pupils in Thurrock have the opportunity to study RS at GCSE, they perform well on average. The average attainment eight score of all pupils of a 1 or 2 grade was 48% compared to 50% nationally.

It was highlighted that Thurrock appeared in position 120 out of 150 local authorities when ranked according to entries for GCSE Religious Studies. Members were disappointed by this figure. The highest ranked authority entered 77% and the lowest 11%. The average point score for all subjects in Thurrock Schools is around 2 points (half a GCSE grade) lower than the national average. The Chair observed that pupils entering a full course at GCSE was at 25% for Thurrock compared to 39% nationally.

ADVICE

SACRE wishes to advise the council of its agreed view that where SACRE has identified strengths or areas for development in relation to Religious Education in specific schools, the subject should form part of the annual conversations conducted by the School Effectiveness Team. This we believe is consistent with School Support Strategy 2019 and the aim that by 2022, there will be an effective process to 'challenge and support all schools to increase quality and standards of education'.¹

¹ Thurrock Council Education Support Strategy 2019-2022
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/education-support-strategy-2019-v02.pdf>

Youth Cabinet report to SACRE

Thurrock's Youth Cabinet is a group of 11 to 19 year-olds, who work to make Thurrock a better place for young people. The Youth Cabinet was set up to give the young people of Thurrock a voice. Youth Cabinet members regularly meet with councillors, council officers and other decision makers to give their views on a number of issues including the school curriculum.

As part of their monitoring work therefore, SACRE invited representatives of the Youth Cabinet to attend a SACRE meeting. Members informed the representatives that SACRE had invited the Youth Cabinet to their meeting as they felt it was important to seek their views about their experiences of Religious Education in Schools and the importance of Religious Education in Thurrock today. The representatives reported enjoying RE lessons more at secondary School than in primary. They felt the material they studied in secondary Religious Education was particularly interesting because it relates to real life scenarios and everyday life. The representatives also reported appreciating the visits they were offered to places of worship. They agreed unanimously that RE should be taught in schools especially as it was important for all young people to know about people from other cultures.

The Youth Cabinet attended the spring term meeting, joining the discussions virtually. SACRE members asked a number of questions. Some of the responses to these questions included the following

1. Their experience of RE at Primary and Secondary School was very different
2. Likewise, where their experience of RE at one phase was in a school with a religious character and not
3. Pupil attitudes to RE were affected by the faith or belief background.
4. They judged that as a generation young people were becoming less religious overall with large gaps in view between pupils who would describe themselves as religious and non-religious peers
5. Some of their schools did not seem to value RE, teachers often appeared not to know answers to their questions, and this made pupils lose interest
6. Several students reported enjoying applying religious ideas to current issues; the environment, animal cruelty, crime and punishment for example. They learnt about the death penalty by looking at different case studies, which made the lesson more interesting because it didn't matter if you are religious or not to appreciate the ideas.
7. They believed that learning how to debate a topic providing evidence to support a point of view, was valuable.
8. Some students were disappointed by the fact that they learnt very little about certain religions e.g. Sikhi and also when the lessons on their own religious tradition did not reflect their own experience.

ADVICE

SACRE wishes to thank all those involved in the Youth Cabinet for their contribution to the monitoring of RE and Collective Worship in Thurrock Schools

SACRE discussion of National Developments in RE

At each meeting, SACRE received an update of some of the national developments in RE. In this reporting year, these updates and publications included the following:

- i. A review of interfaith engagement led by Colin Bloom.
- ii. The Ofsted Research Review on Religious Education 2021
- iii. The launch of the Theos Report on [Worldviews in Religious Education](#)
- iv. Publication of updated guidance on the statutory provision for RE in Academies and Free Schools from the [Department of Education](#)

Other matters discussed that fall under the remit of SACRE

Spirited Arts

One of the highlights of the year was a local competition mirroring the national Spirited Arts Competition. The Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE) were really impressed by the work of those children who took part in the competition this year. The quality of the artwork and of the commentaries was high and it was very challenging to judge a winner for each age group.

Spirited Arts aims to get people thinking about Religious Education through Art. Children were asked to produce a piece of artwork together with a commentary on one of a set of themes linked to their Religious Education lessons. The themes this year were:

1. "We have far more in common with each other than that which divides us."
2. God's good earth? - ("Beautiful World, wonderful God?")
3. Where is God?
4. Healing
5. Inspiring!

Here is a full list of the prize winners

Winners:

- ❖ Sofia: Stifford Clays Primary school (Nursery class) EYFS Theme God's good earth - Beautiful World - Beautiful God
- ❖ Marian: Quarry Hill Academy KS1 Theme: Where is God?
- ❖ Aylin: Warren Primary School LKS2 God's good earth – Theme: Beautiful World - Beautiful God
- ❖ David O: Quarry Hill Academy UKS2 Theme: We have far more in common with each other than that which divides us

KS2 Runners Up:

Due the higher volume of KS2 entries SACRE decided to award two runners up in this category

- ❖ Sophie: Purfleet Primary Academy KS2 Theme: God's good earth - Beautiful World - Beautiful God
- ❖ Andrei: Quarry Hill Academy KS2 God's good earth – Theme: Beautiful World - Beautiful God

You can view the artwork and writing of these talented and thoughtful children on the SACRE area of the Thurrock website. <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/religious-education/sacre-committee>

Agreed Syllabus review

SACRE convened its Agreed Syllabus conference in the Spring Term 2021 and considered the following three options in relation to the syllabus.

- A. To renew the license with RE Today which included a supplement to insert into the current syllabus (2016/2021) this would be circulated electronically to schools following the Agreed Syllabus.
- B. To adopt RE Today's most recent syllabus model B
- C. To commission a bespoke new Agreed Syllabus with assistance from RE today.

Following discussion, the conference agreed in principle to opt for A pending a review of teacher views on the syllabus and their priorities for further supporting guidance.

Teacher Education

SACRE noted the disappointing news that bursaries had been withdrawn for those training to teach RE. Given that the DfE had failed to meet its target for recruiting teachers of RE and the fact that three times as many lessons of RE are taught by those with no-post A level qualification in the subject, it was difficult to see how this could be justified.

In more positive news, the government had decided to continue funding subject knowledge enhancement courses so that those with a degree in a subject outside the Theology and Religious Studies field could be better prepared to train as a teacher of RE.

SACRE continued to monitor opportunities for training and to circulate these to teachers in Thurrock. These included:

- i. [Farmington Scholarship](#): This funded opportunity for a teacher to be seconded from school to carry out research was agreed to be an exciting opportunity and the adviser was asked to ensure all teachers were informed about the offer and encouraged to apply.

Appendix A Workplan 2020-2021

SACRE WORK PLAN
To meet the statutory duties of a SACRE

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date	Success criteria
1. SACRE meetings are planned and dates published annually	Agenda planning Liaison with relevant council departments Meeting preparation Report writing Meeting attendance Minute taking Publication of meeting agendas and minutes	Clerk, Chair, Adviser LA representative, members	Termly SACRE meetings	Meetings are effective meetings with actions followed up between meetings Members have a working knowledge of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issues affecting RE in the area • the Agreed Syllabus for RE • an understanding of the responsibilities of SACRE
2. SACRE have the opportunity to consider national developments in relation to RE in Thurrock	Consider relevant material from National organisations (AREAIC, NATRE, NASACRE as well as the DfE, Ofsted and Thurrock Council departments	Adviser	As information is published	Items on the Agenda for each meeting, Attendance at relevant meetings e.g. NASACRE AGM Minutes record discussions and actions
3. Produce annual report of the work of SACRE including advice to the council.	Collate information, source data and draft report Ensure final report presented to LA Send copy to Department for Education and to NASACRE	Adviser to draft Chair to write introduction Clerk to circulate. Elected representative to	Spring Term (to account for data publication dates)	Completed draft in time for Spring meeting Report presented to council Copies sent to all schools Copy acknowledged by DfE

		present to council		
4. Engage with local schools and Academy Trusts to understand how Religious Education and Collective Worship are provided in Thurrock	Officers to identify schools to host virtual visits for a sample of primary and secondary schools Members to hold online discussions with subject leaders and where possible with children and young people Committee considers school reports	SACRE members at least one per year	Up to 4 school visits - 2 per term	Meaningful visits or discussion completed, and reports discussed at SACRE meetings.
5. Provide information on the RE curriculum to schools including through training	Update schools on current developments in RE (NATRE and other material requested by SACRE) Host a SACRE Youth Conference to model high quality provision to teachers of RE [Note: the summer Conference was postponed due to the pandemic. Might a virtual conference be planned if a face to face event is not possible in summer 2021]	Adviser Adviser and RE Today	Termly Annually - Summer Term subject to funding	Schools in receipt of material Teachers respond to material received Teachers raise questions to the adviser
6. Monitor provision for RE and Collective Worship	Source and present national and local data as follows:	Adviser All SACRE members	Annually	LA respond to advice offered on strengths of RE and collective worship, and areas in need of development

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – GCSE validated and unvalidated results and entries (local and national) – School workforce data (local and national) – Surveys of provision and of issues such as withdrawal, use of agreed syllabus, who teaches RE etc (local) – Review school websites – Write to schools about findings – Sample collective worship policies 	LA representative		Schools respond to feedback on their websites and policies
7. Evaluate SACRE work and establish priorities	Item at autumn term meeting	All SACRE members	Autumn term meeting	Evaluation identified success criteria are met

Schedule 2020/21 Date of meeting	Subject	Objective (note – objectives 1 and 2 apply to all meetings)		
Autumn 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National developments - update • Monitoring provision via school workforce data • Review of membership and attendance • Evaluation of work plan • Review of provision via school website - proposed template 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 • 7 • 2 • 6 		
Spring 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring provision via GCSE and A level results • Annual report approval • Relationships: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and Academies • the Council • Governors • Communities of religion and belief </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thurrock work on Community Integration • NASACRE • Youth Cabinet • Regional Schools Commissioners </td> </tr> </table> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and Academies • the Council • Governors • Communities of religion and belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thurrock work on Community Integration • NASACRE • Youth Cabinet • Regional Schools Commissioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 • 3 • 4+5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and Academies • the Council • Governors • Communities of religion and belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thurrock work on Community Integration • NASACRE • Youth Cabinet • Regional Schools Commissioners 			
Summer 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards and Achievements in RE in schools • Review of SACRE website • Review of Collective Worship and right of withdrawal • Review of SACRE Youth Conference • Annual report including GCSE results • Ofsted Framework on RE – latest reports [postponed from autumn term] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 • 6 • 6 • 5 • 4 • 7 • 6 		

Appendix B - Provision for RE as reported in the workforce census -November 2020

School name	School type	% year 7 hours - RE	% year 8 hours - RE	% year 9 hours - RE	% year 10 hours - RE	% year 11 hours - RE	% all hours - RE 2020	% all hours - RE 2019	Change from 2019 to 2020 in total hours of RE	Reporting issues/changes from 2019
The Hathaway Academy	Academy sponsor led	5.9	6.5	4.0	1.2	1.2	3.7	0.7	Increase	Hathaway now accurately reporting RE
Ortu Hassenbrook Academy	Academy converter	4.9	5.1	5.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	3.2	Decrease	Ortu now reporting RE 7-9 -not 10-11
Harris Academy Riverside	Free schools	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Harris Academy Ockendon	Academy converter	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	1.2	3.3	Decrease	
Orsett Heath Academy	Free schools	2.2	.	.	.	.	2.2	.	unavailable	
Thames Park Secondary School	Free schools	4.2	.	.	.	.	4.2	.	unavailable	
Harris Academy Chafford Hundred	Academy converter	4.4	3.9	3.9	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.9	Increase	Harris now reporting RE 7-9. RE and Philosophy both reported
Grays Convent High School	Voluntary aided school	10.8	10.6	9.3	9.9	9.9	10.1	8.3	Increase	
William Edwards School	Academy converter	4.8	3.8	4.4	2.9	1.1	3.3	2.5	Increase	Now reporting some provision for year 11 but no whole cohort
Ortu Gable Hall School	Academy converter	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Not sure what has happened here. Looks like there has been a cut in provision or mis reporting

St Clere's School	Academy converter	5.3	5.1	2.6	0.0	0.0	2.4	2.7	Decrease
The Gateway Academy	Academy sponsor led	3.8	4.5	10.1	9.5	0.0	5.5	5.5	Decrease