

Bexley Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Annual Report for the academic year 2018-2019



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on Religious Education (SACRE)

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1. INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to be able to introduce the Bexley SACRE Annual Report for the academic year 2018 - 2019, and my second Annual Report as Chairman.

I started my time as Chairman at the beginning of a period that could see an exciting and encouraging change for RE and SACRE's, when the initial findings of the Commission on RE (CoRE) had not long been published. The final report has subsequently been published and, to all intents and purposes, appears to have been side-lined by the government. Whilst the SACRE agreed in principle with a number of the CoRE recommendations, it could not support all of them: some certainly made the right noises and offered some hope for RE. Unfortunately, it would appear that the concerns many have raised are not going to be listened to and acted upon, and the demise of the subject continues, possibly to an irreparable state.

A review of the Bexley Agreed Syllabus has commenced, albeit at a very early stage, and we are facing the conundrum faced by many others about how best to deliver a new Syllabus (which is what is required) with the limited resources available, to a relatively small number of schools who follow the current version. We have not resolved that conundrum just yet and await more research and advice on a suitable way forward for our Agreed Syllabus Conference.

At this point I must thank those who deliver the current Syllabus in our schools. Whilst requiring review, it most certainly helps to form part of the spiritual and moral enrichment of young people. I have heard that it is well received by those who teach and follow it, but the advice is that it must evolve further to meet current teaching methods.

In section 3 we report on RE provision and RE information in our schools. Following some basic research, the picture that has emerged is not healthy, and so we embarked on some work to raise the profile of RE and good practice. Some engagement with schools and governors is also planned, as are some visits by local authority staff to observe and report back on collective worship provision (see section 5 of this report). The work will continue into the period of our next report.

For 2019, once again I am delighted to be able to congratulate our teachers and students on some excellent results, all against a very challenging time for the subject. The SACRE shall be looking at examination results and trends in more detail later in 2019 - 2020, but a review earlier in the current reporting year revealed a continued decline in examination entries in Bexley in 2018. As discussed in section 3 of this report, the SACRE believes a number of factors are to blame, but it is clearer than ever before that the subject is being marginalised by government.

We were without an Adviser for all but two months of this report, and so we did not issue a termly Newsletter to schools or hold any training sessions for teachers. I am delighted that we now have a new Adviser on board, and I would like to personally offer her a warm welcome, and express my thanks that she has plans to resurrect all the good work of our previous Adviser, which was always warmly welcomed by all.

We have taken a closer look at our, albeit limited, finances this year, and have agreed a procedure to receive regular updates in the future. However, when staffing costs are taken into account, the likelihood is that our local authority exceeds the NASACRE recommended allocation, but we just do not have enough resource (both financial and personnel) to fulfil our role to the extent that we would like, and certainly not to the extent that others seem to expect.

We continually have difficulties in recruiting members to a number of vacancies in Group A and we have not yet filled all the long-term vacancies in Group C.

I was delighted to attend an inspiring Faith in the Community awards event organised by our local authority earlier this year, and it is very encouraging to see so many people from various communities and faith groups around the Borough of Bexley are working very hard for the benefit of everyone.

A good background in RE will surely help many more see the benefits of community cohesion, and then work to achieve it. However, whilst several of our hard-pressed teachers are delivering some excellent RE, it is clear that many schools are choosing not to give the subject the time it requires, and deserves. This paints a sorry picture for the future of this most important subject both locally and more so nationally.

The relationship between schools and local authorities has changed, and in Bexley we are no different, with most teaching institutions having now converted to academy status. Although we are committed to working with our education providers, the communication is rarely two way, and is proving difficult.

I would like to close by thanking the SACRE members who have departed, and extend a warm welcome to our new members, and to thank all members and Council officers for their contribution to the work of the SACRE.

Christine Catterall



Councillor Christine Catterall
Chairman of the Bexley SACRE

2. ADVICE TO STATUTORY BODIES

Our schools

The London Borough of Bexley has more than 80 schools, with three quarters being primary schools.

The majority of the Borough's schools have moved to academy status and the SACRE's ability to influence and intervene is limited. Whilst some schools continue to engage with the limited number of initiatives the SACRE is able to develop, they are mostly in the primary sector.

We do try to ensure that every school is aware of their responsibilities and, where appropriate, ensure that those required to follow the Bexley Agreed Syllabus do so, and encourage others to have regard to it where no specific religious denomination or other syllabus applies.

Our profile

Notwithstanding the above we reported last year that some schools and teachers are not aware of the SACRE, or of its work, and so we asked staff in the local authority's education directorate to undertake some awareness-raising for schools, governors and teachers.

Through our Adviser, the SACRE issued a termly Newsletter, and this helped to raise our profile, but we have been without an Adviser since July 2018 and further editions of the Newsletter have been suspended pending the appointment of a new Adviser. Once the Newsletter is resurrected, we will continue the practice adopted last year to issue it to a wider audience, including school Governors.

However, with limited resources and an ever-increasing number of academies, we are finding it difficult to promote the SACRE and its work over and above some general activities as explained above.

Agreed Syllabus

The Bexley Agreed Syllabus was scheduled for a statutory review by April 2019, and as part of the planning in late 2018 / early 2019 we asked the local authority to conduct an initial scoping exercise on the suitability of the current Syllabus.

We were advised that the scoping group were of the view that the Syllabus did need reviewing, as although much of the knowledge and organisation will be valuable moving forward, there are significant areas which may need adjusting, in the light of changes in education since 2014.

Given this, an Agreed Syllabus Conference was convened in March 2019 and will commence work in 2020 following further research and recommendations on a way forward.

Further details are provided in section 4 of this report.

SMSC

The SACRE believes to complement RE in school, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development should be promoted. However, following a very successful SMSC conference in 2017 the SACRE has not had the resources to carry out follow up research, or to contact delegates on whether anything learned has been put into practice.

Training

It had been normal practice for the local authority and our adviser to jointly host networking events for RE subject leaders. However, no such events were held in the period of this report because of the absence of an Adviser.

The SACRE is extremely grateful to the local authority staff, and our adviser, all of whom undertook a great deal of hard work to organise RE training and related events, and we are pleased to hear that our newly-appointed Adviser has plans to resurrect these useful events.

No training events for Governors have been held in the period of this report.

Newsletter

Through our adviser, the SACRE used to produce a Newsletter every term. It was designed to publicise local events, training opportunities and articles and provide details of teaching resources of help and interest to RE subject leaders and teachers. It was also used to keep our schools informed about best practice.

The Newsletter received regular and positive feedback. As reported earlier, the Newsletter has not been issued in the absence of an Adviser, however, we are grateful to have been told that the first Newsletter for more than a year will be prepared and issued by our new Adviser in Autumn 2019.

Teaching resources

There is nothing specific to report this year, but the SACRE keeps this matter under review.

3. STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF PROVISION OF RE

Provision of RE in schools

As reported last time, the SACRE had decided that although a NASACRE case study about how to complain to schools over their (lack of) RE provision offered a viable way forward, members preferred to undertake some desk-based research to ascertain data on RE provision in Bexley's schools.

The research was undertaken in 2018 and investigated every website of all 83 schools and academies in the Borough in order to ascertain, as best as we could, the RE provision, the Ofsted requirement to publish the RE curriculum for all year groups, a statement about when and how collective worship would be conducted and to seek out statements about the option for parents to withdraw children from RE and collective worship.

A 2017 survey had already raised concerns amongst SACRE members, which had revealed that the provision of RE may be lacking, and so the new research was intended to be more thorough to gain a better understanding of the position. Furthermore, it was agreed that the website research would also offer a good lead into the review of the Bexley Agreed Syllabus.

The SACRE agreed the criteria for the research so that for each establishment the following six questions were to be answered:

- Is the RE curriculum listed for each year group (as stated in Ofsted guidance)?
- Does the school / academy state that it follows the Bexley Agreed Syllabus for RE?
- If the Bexley Agreed Syllabus is not followed, which one is?
- Does the school / academy provide information about Collective Worship (assemblies)?
- Does the school state that parents may withdraw their children from RE and Collective Worship (assemblies)?
- Was the information easy to find on the website and clear to those reading it, especially parents / carers?

Although it was accepted that the research was just a snap shot at a particular time, the findings showed that only 13 schools (11 primary, two secondary) provided all the information set out in the agreed criteria. It was noted that this was not about non-compliance, but more about good practice. Nevertheless, members considered this outcome to be very disappointing, if not particularly surprising, and they agreed that schools were not serving parents well in this regard.

The research also revealed that 35 schools do not list the RE curriculum as required and 27 schools say they follow the Bexley Agreed Syllabus. Only a quarter of all schools (21) refer to the possibility of withdrawing pupils from both RE and Collective Worship.

It was agreed that by drawing on the research there was now an opportunity to raise the profile of RE and good practice, and that because the responsibility to improve rests with schools, the research outcomes should be drawn to the attention of Governors, Headteachers, Heads of RE and RE teachers. To this end we agreed that two letters should be sent: one to congratulate the schools that have demonstrated good and best practice, and one to those schools who, in the opinion of the SACRE, need to improve.

Members also agreed with a proposal for a 20% sample of the Borough's school and academy websites be reviewed each year against the same criteria as the original research, to ascertain if any improvement is evident. The sampling will focus on those schools and academies who were identified as requiring improvement. This is based on the assumption that those demonstrating good practice will continue to do so. However, if the SACRE wishes, about half of those currently demonstrating good practice could also be revisited.

This research approach was adopted as the least labour-intensive option and, as we were also aware of the new Ofsted Framework due to be applied from September 2019, it was felt to be an appropriate response at the time.

Following the issuing of the letters, nine schools subsequently took up the offer of advice to help improve the information available and, following the advice given, one more primary school is now (August 2019) demonstrating good practice.

Religious Studies examinations in Bexley

The SACRE continues to be proud of the results Bexley students achieve in their Religious Studies GCSE, AS and A Level examinations. But it should not be overlooked that good results would not be possible without the excellent teaching staff and RE subject leaders we have in the Borough, and the SACRE owes these dedicated people a debt of gratitude.

We discussed the 2018 examinations results in March 2019 and noted, with some regret, that the falling trend in GCSE Short and Full Course entries was continuing. However, 2018 presented another set of excellent results for the Borough's 2,000+ students who sat a Religious Studies examination. The students, their teachers and RE Leaders should be congratulated. Summary tables of the results for Bexley, and a brief comparison with those for England, are set out at the end of this section.

We shall consider the 2019 examinations in more detail when we meet in November 2019 and March 2020.

Religious Studies examinations in England

Aware of the concerns nationally (i.e. in England) about a decline in those sitting a Religious Studies examination the SACRE decided to make some comparisons with the core subjects of English, Mathematics, History and Geography. Qfqual analytics published data was used.

In March 2019 members noted there had been a percentage decline in examination entries (as assumed from the results data) in 2018 across many of the aforementioned subjects at GCSE, AS and A Level, particularly at AS Level. In general, the decline for Religious Studies was more pronounced. A similar picture emerged when comparing 2017 to 2016.

Using provisional data for 2019 there continued to be a severe downward decline in all Religious Studies examinations entries since 2016. At GCSE level this is more marked, given that all other subjects had seen increases in entries (with the exception of a one-year decline for History and Mathematics). At AS Level the picture is very similar across all examinations, with the majority showing a decline in entries of between 82% and 94%. Religious Studies was at the upper end of these percentages. At A Level, with the exception of Mathematics and Religious Studies, all examination entries are between 1.7% and 13.9% lower. Mathematics examinations entries had increased marginally in 2019, whilst entries for Religious Studies had declined by up to 29%.

Whilst there will always be annual fluctuations in entry levels as a result of variations in student numbers, the change in Religious Studies examination entries is more pronounced than for the other subjects compared.

It is also worth noting that, with the exception of the AS Level in Summer 2018, the number of Religious Studies examinations entries, as a proportion of the entries for all subjects, is declining year on year. For example, in 2017 the proportion of all GCSE candidates who took the Religious Studies exam was 5.8%, and by 2019 this had fallen to 4.8%, representing about 51,000 fewer candidates.

Some SACRE members believed the introduction of the EBacc. was a primary cause for the decline, and we plan to write to the Secretary of State for Education on this matter. Others suggested decoupling of the AS Level was another, and one further view expressed was that it is linked to the fact that some schools have reduced the options for their students so that only the best eight subjects are needed, meaning fewer exams are now taken (10 instead of 12), with Religious Studies being one of the casualties.

Against this background, it must be said that the SACRE is grateful for the work of our RE subject leaders and teachers in the Borough, against a national picture of teachers and schools struggling to meet their legal obligations.

The English Baccalaureate

We plan to write to the Secretary of State for Education on this matter. The Bexley SACRE shares the views of many in the teaching profession that the exclusion of GCSE Religious Studies from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) has had a serious detrimental impact on learning about religion and belief in schools. There is evidence indicating that curriculum time for Religious Education (RE) has come under pressure, sometimes resulting in the marginalisation of RE teaching, with many schools reporting that curriculum time has been cut to make more room for core EBacc subjects.

Our consensus view is that excluding the GCSE RS from the EBacc has been demoralising for our teaching staff, it has devalued RE and has adversely impacted the academic, moral and social development of pupils. In our society today there has never been a greater need for the new and enlightened perspectives that good RE can deliver.

Statements from successive Ministers about there being a statutory requirement to teach RE are all well and good, but the subject will never receive the required curriculum time until the government ends this marginalisation of the subject and starts treating it with the respect and importance it deserves. An expectation that powerless SACREs can resolve the problems being created is unrealistic. The future for the subject is extremely uncertain if this continues.

Complaints

In the period covered by this Report, there were no complaints made to the SACRE about RE or the provision thereof.

Religious Studies GCSE examination results: Bexley, 2007 – 2019
(2019 data is provisional)

GCSE Full Course	Entries	Passes A* - C	% Passes A* - C	All passes A* - G	% All passes A* - G
2007	730	510	69.9	723	99.0
2008	823	675	82.0	822	99.9
2009	1,010	746	73.4	994	98.4
2010	1,120	829	74.0	1,116	99.6
2011	1,625	1,161	71.4	1,609	99.0
2012	2,133	1,458	68.4	2,091	98.0
2013	1,977	1,481	74.9	1,953	98.8
2014	2,136	1,650	77.2	2,111	98.8
2015	2,062	1,635	79.3	2,031	98.5
2016	2,197	1,625	74.0	2,163	98.5
2017	1,982	1,533	77.3	1,960	98.9

	Entries	Passes 9 - 4	% Passes 9 - 4	All Passes 9 - 1	% All Passes 9 - 1
2018	1,779	1,293	72.7	1,740	97.8
2019	1,642	1,359	82.8	1,630	99.3

GCSE Short Course	Entries	Passes A* - C	% Passes A* - C	All passes A* - G	% All passes A* - G
2007	1,675	962	57.4	1,609	96.1
2008	1,554	932	60.0	1,525	98.1
2009	1,417	900	63.5	1,395	98.5
2010	1,631	892	54.7	1,590	97.5
2011	1,047	593	56.6	1,008	96.3
2012	536	299	55.8	510	95.1
2013	706	357	50.6	673	95.3
2014	437	178	40.7	395	90.4
2015	216	44	20.4	198	91.7
2016	3	1	33.3	3	100.0
2017	37	1	2.7	30	81.1

	Entries	Passes 9 - 4	% Passes 9 - 4	All Passes 9 - 1	% All Passes 9 - 1
2018	23	0	0.0	17	73.9
2019	0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Religious Studies AS and A Level examination results: Bexley, 2009 – 2019
(2019 data is provisional)

AS Level	Entries	Passes A - B	% Passes A - B	All passes A - E	% All passes A - E
2009	108	41	38.0	89	82.4
2010	104	40	38.5	91	87.5
2011	98	32	32.7	89	90.8
2012	142	68	47.9	122	85.9
2013	140	52	37.1	121	86.4
2014	118	54	45.8	113	95.8
2015	226	97	42.9	212	93.8
2016	238	95	39.9	226	95.0
2017	154	70	45.5	142	92.2
2018	151	54	35.8	134	88.7
2019	23	8	34.8	21	91.3

A Level	Entries	Passes A* - B	% Passes A* - B	All passes A* - E	% All passes A* - E
2009	67	31	46.3	67	100.0
2010	58	34	58.6	57	98.3
2011	68	28	41.2	67	98.5
2012	61	28	45.9	56	91.8
2013	80	46	57.5	78	97.5
2014	82	47	57.3	80	97.6
2015	90	44	48.9	88	97.8
2016	148	79	53.4	148	100.0
2017	130	72	55.4	129	99.2
2018	113	51	45.1	108	95.6
2019	104	37	35.6	101	97.1

4. AGREED SYLLABUS

The Bexley Agreed Syllabus

The current Agreed Syllabus was introduced in September 2014, and continues to be well received. And we hear that it is well established in schools that follow it.

The Agreed Syllabus includes an online resource, with the non-statutory elements predominantly web based and available via a number of media, such as Bexley Fronter etc. Teachers we have spoken to welcome this on line resource, and have noted that the SACRE is able to quickly and efficiently review the non-statutory elements, respond to feedback, and maintain and update the available material so that we can provide the best available resources to our schools.

With the Syllabus embedded in our schools, we are encouraging teachers to share their good practice.

In addition, the CRiBS organisation (Christian Resources in Bexley Schools) delivers some of the Agreed Syllabus modules in our schools and they say they have received excellent feedback. CRiBS also comment that the Syllabus is easy to follow and easy to deliver and understand.

Suitability of the current Syllabus

The Bexley Agreed Syllabus was scheduled for a statutory review by April 2019, and as part of the planning in late 2018 / early 2019 we asked the local authority to conduct an initial scoping exercise on the suitability of the current Syllabus.

Notwithstanding the observation in the previous sub-section, the scoping group reported that that they were of the view that the Syllabus did need reviewing, as although much of the knowledge and organisation will be valuable moving forward, there are significant areas which may need adjusting, in the light of changes in education since 2014. They advised that there are significant areas which may need adjusting, in the light of changes in education since the Agreed Syllabus was produced in 2014. This view was based on three areas: Assessment Methodology (changes in practice require review); Progression (a more explicit programme map is recommended); and, Curriculum Content (content and expectations from RE require review).

Our next review

In the light of the scoping group's advice an Agreed Syllabus Conference was convened in March 2019. The Conference has not met again, pending further research requested by us into the options available for a new Syllabus.

The SACRE remains concerned about the amount of work and expertise required to prepare a new Syllabus and feels this should not be underestimated. Nor should the cost of adopting and / or adapting an off-the-shelf Syllabus, for example. Another material consideration for the SACRE, and the Agreed Syllabus Conference, is the number of our schools who report that they currently use the Bexley Agreed Syllabus.

A recent review of RE and collective worship information that the SACRE would expect a school to provide on its website for parents / carers has revealed the following:

	Website states Bexley Agreed Syllabus is followed		Website states another Syllabus is followed		Syllabus unknown - no information found	
Primary	26	42%	10	16%	26	42%
Secondary	3	14%	5	24%	13	62%
Total	29	35%	15	18%	39	47%

Nevertheless, the SACRE has agreed in principle to the Agreed Syllabus Conference preparing a new Agreed Syllabus to reflect current practice. The Conference is anticipated to reconvene in 2020 to commence the review.

5. COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision of collective worship in schools

The SACRE had last conducted research into collective worship provision in 2013. In compiling the 2018 website information research mentioned in section 3 of this report we wanted to be able to ascertain if anecdotal evidence that suggested collective worship continues to appear to be inclusive, varied and of benefit to students, had changed.

The 2018 research helped us ascertain which schools state when and how collective worship is conducted and had led us to a different opinion on not only the provision of collective worship in our schools, but also the quality, variety and inclusiveness thereof.

As mentioned earlier, the initial findings of the 2018 research revealed that for many schools the provision of relevant information is lacking.

The SACRE was disappointed to find that as many as half of our schools and academies (13 secondary and 30 primary) are not providing the recommended information on collective worship, which in turn leads the SACRE to believe that provision of the statutory requirement for a daily act of worship is not being met.

Based on this knowledge the SACRE agreed to remind all school Governors of their responsibilities in respect of collective worship. This will be done through a newsletter and a discussion at a Governor's Forum.

In addition, members of the local authority's Strategic Education and Improvement Team will conduct up to 10 visits to schools and academies in the 2019/20 academic year, to ascertain collective worship provision, and the SACRE will receive regular reports on those visits.

A key objective for the SACRE in the next 12 months is, therefore, to assess and the reports of those visits and ascertain what further action, if any, is required in respect of the provision of collective worship.

Those schools who have met the information requirements have been sent congratulatory letters.

Determination and complaints

For a number of years the SACRE has had a comprehensive determination framework that provides guidance on the procedures in the London Borough of Bexley for Head Teachers of schools wishing to seek a determination in respect of collective worship, or renewal or review of a previous determination.

This framework has never been brought into use and, as might be expected, therefore, in the period of this report no determinations were applied for.

The SACRE did not receive any complaints about collective worship.

6. MANAGEMENT OF SACRE

Professional and administrative support

We expect a senior officer from the local authority's Strategic Education and Improvement Team to attend every meeting, and it is very disappointing that this has not always been the case in the period of this report. An officer of the Committee Services and Scrutiny Team of the local authority clerks the SACRE meetings and acts as the point of contact for individual members and external enquiries.

Until July 2018 the SACRE had access to services provided by our RE Adviser, for up to 10 days a year, but following her departure we were without an Adviser for 12 months, and this effectively ended any communication with schools and RE teachers in this period.

We are delighted that our new Adviser has plans, amongst other things, to resurrect the SACRE termly Newsletter and regular RE networking sessions for teachers.

Development of the SACRE and SACRE training

SACRE members are encouraged to attend national and regional events and to report back to subsequent SACRE meetings, but other than those organised by the local authority or the SACRE, no such events were attended in the period covered by this Report.

Any new members are provided with details of the work of the Bexley SACRE and are given copies of relevant National Association of SACRE literature.

In March 2018 we had started a new self-assessment process, using the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) toolkit, but given some substantial changes in membership in the intervening period, this process was halted: there was little point in conducting such an exercise with members who were finding their feet with the SACRE and its work.

We have plans to re-visit the self-assessment scores first achieved in 2013, and may well re-visit the 2018 outcome on "Standards and Quality of Provision of RE", given our recent review findings, as reported in sections 3 and 5. We would hope to be able to show that the six sub-categories of the assessment show some improvement from earlier results.

Finance

The SACRE receives no independent funding, although we are grateful to have access to a small allocation from the local authority's education budget should the need arise for a limited number of conference delegate fees, for example, and our NASACRE membership fee. The fee for the SACRE's Adviser is also paid from this budget.

Prompted by NASACRE comments on budgets we heard about our budget and requested greater clarity moving forward, to the extent that twice a year we will receive an updated budget template, to include staffing costs. The inclusion of staffing costs

will take the SACRE's allocation beyond the recommended allocations from the Central Schools Services Block.

Membership and Constitution

Maintaining a strong membership is an ongoing concern for the SACRE.

Groups B is full to requirement which is positive, although there remain vacancies in Groups A and C, and it is these vacancies that are proving to be the most difficult to fill. With one or two exceptions, retention of members in these two Groups is proving difficult too: when a vacancy occurs in Group A, for example, a number of local and national organisations are approached and appear to be either unable or unwilling to nominate someone.

Fewer members means there is even more expectation on those that remain and who, we must not forget, give their time voluntarily.

Every four years, before local elections, the Chairman and Secretary conduct a membership review. At the first meeting after the conclusion of that review a period of time is set aside for a more comprehensive introduction to SACREs and the work of the Bexley SACRE: this acts as an additional induction for new members and a refresher for existing members.

All new members receive various NASACRE literature and background to the work of the Bexley SACRE.

The SACRE Constitution was last reviewed in 2010. Whilst it is still fit for purpose, it could warrant some updating and our Secretary has conducted some research into other SACRE Constitutions and national guidelines. At some point members will consider proposals for a refreshed Constitution.

Details of the SACRE membership and attendance at meetings during the period of this report, are provided in the following three pages.

NASACRE Code of Conduct

We have adopted the NASACRE Code of Conduct, which will complement our Constitution.

The composition of the SACRE for the 2018 - 2019 academic year was as follows:

GROUP A (CHRISTIAN AND OTHER FAITHS)

Baptist	Mr Mark Leveson	
Free Church (Evangelical Christians)	Mr Paul Weston	
Islam	Mrs Faozia Rashid	
Islam	Dr Faz Rashid	
Methodist	Mrs Di Spowles	
Sikh	Mr Kulvinder Singh	
Buddhism	Mr Bijay Gurung	Since March '19
Hinduism	Vacancy	
Judaism	Vacancy	
Roman Catholic	Vacancy	

GROUP B (CHURCH OF ENGLAND)

Ms Virginia Corbyn		Since February '19
Rev'd Alison Healy		
Mrs Dorothy Jones	(Vice Chairman)	
Mrs Michelle Torrance		
Fr. Philip Wells		Until December '18

GROUP C (TEACHERS IN THE AUTHORITY)

Mrs June Ben Rabah
Mr Matthew Harris
Ms Cerys Siney

GROUP D (THE AUTHORITY)

Councillor Esther Amaning		
Councillor Cheryl Bacon		Since May '19
Councillor Christine Bishop		Since May '19
Councillor Christine Catterall	(Chairman)	
Councillor James Hunt		
Councillor Howard Jackson		
Councillor Wendy Perfect		
Councillor Melvin Seymour		Since May '19
Councillor Adam Wildman		Since May '19
Councillor Nigel Betts		Until May '19
Councillor Sybil Camsey		Until May '19
Councillor Sue Gower MBE		Until May '19

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

None

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (other than Councillor substitutes)

None

OBSERVER

Ms Virginia Corbyn	Until February '19
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ADVISERS AND OFFICERS

Mrs Lauren Ovenden	Head of Education Partnership, Schools & Colleges	
Ms Rizwana Rehman	Part-time Adviser	Since June '19

Attendance by members during the 2018 - 2019 academic year was as follows:

	Possible	Apologies submitted	Absent	Attended
<u>Group A</u>				
Mr Bijay Gurung	2	0	0	2
Mr Mark Leveson	3	2	0	1
Mrs Faozia Rashid	3	1	0	2
Dr Faz Rashid	3	0	0	3
Mr Kulvinder Singh	3	0	2	1
Mrs Di Spowles	3	1	0	2
Mr Paul Weston	3	1	0	2
 <u>Group B</u>				
Ms Virginia Corbyn	2	0	0	2
Rev'd Alison Healy	3	1	0	2
Mrs Dorothy Jones (Vice Chairman)	3	0	0	3
Mrs Michelle Torrance	3	2	0	1
Fr. Philip Wells	1	1	0	0
 <u>Group C</u>				
Mrs June Ben Rabah	3	0	0	3
Mr Matthew Harris	3	0	0	3
Ms Cerys Siney	3	1	0	2

	Possible	Apologies submitted	Absent	Actual
<u>Group D</u>				
Councillor Esther Amaning	3	0	0	3
Councillor Cheryl Bacon	1	0	0	1
Councillor Nigel Betts	1	0	0	1
Councillor Christine Bishop	1	0	0	1
Councillor Sybil Camsey	1	0	0	1
Councillor Christine Catterall (Chairman)	3	1	0	2
Councillor Sue Gower MBE	2	2	0	0
Councillor James Hunt	3	1	0	2
Councillor Howard Jackson	3	0	0	3
Councillor Wendy Perfect	1	1	0	0
Councillor Melvin Seymour	1	0	0	1
Councillor Adam Wildman	1	0	1	0
<u>Observer</u>				
Ms Virginia Corbyn	1	0	0	1
<u>Adviser and local authority lead officers</u>				
Mrs Lauren Ovenden	3	0	1	2

7. SACRE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Our activities

Bexley SACRE is a member of the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE). As mentioned earlier in this report, we have adopted the NASACRE Code of Conduct.

The SACRE works in collaboration with the local Diocesan Boards.

The CRiBS organisation (Christian Resources in Bexley Schools) continues to be represented on the SACRE.

A local Mosque has kindly offered their premises for the SACRE to hold a meeting, and confirmed an offer to schools to undertake an educational visit.

A local Inter Faith Forum has been resurrected, and a number of our members attend Forum meetings. In addition, we include in our meeting agendas details of forthcoming Forum activities and events.

The contribution of the SACRE to the local authority agenda has been primarily through the provision of RE resources and RE subject leader training and networking events, but as reported elsewhere these were suspended during the period of this report.

Community cohesion

A Community Partnerships Team was established in our local authority in 2018, and in 2019 the SACRE received a presentation about a draft Connected Communities Strategy for Bexley, developed in close conversation with the Borough's residents, local volunteers, local businesses, faith groups, community groups and charities.

The Strategy went live later in 2019 and is intended to set out how the Council will involve local people, community groups and businesses more in shaping communities and solutions to local challenges. We were delighted to hear how the Strategy proposed to help everyone develop positive relationships in their community.

Members discussed a number of activities that they were aware of in local schools or faith communities that were promoting integration, raising awareness and generally bringing people together from a range of backgrounds to enhance the feeling of a connected community and Bexley as a place.

Prior to this our Chairman had attended an inspiring Faith in the Communities Awards evening, to celebrate the contribution that faith groups make to the Borough of Bexley and local communities. Jointly organised by the Bexley Interfaith Forum and the London Borough of Bexley the event celebrated some excellent and wide-ranging work being undertaken by various faith communities in the Borough who wanted to do something for the communities they are an integral part of.

Consultations and correspondence

We discuss topics of interest in the regular issues of the NASACRE Newsletter.

The SACRE has been following closely, and with interest, the work of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE). Members discussed the Commission's final report "Religion and Worldviews: a national plan for RE" and were in general agreement with 6 of the 11 recommendations arising, but the view was that many questions have been left unanswered and a number of concerns were expressed.

For example, in respect of the local syllabus, it was confirmed that non-religious worldviews are not specifically highlighted as a topic, although there is likely to be an intention to teach in some secondary schools, and many schools will address these issues in class discussions as and when the matter arises.

Members were greatly concerned that much more work and responsibility was recommended for the successor to a SACRE, particularly around developing programmes of study and curriculum materials for use across local authority boundaries. This was not something that members felt could, or should, fall to the new body, which ought to focus on its own local authority and schools alone.

There were mixed views on what might constitute "worldviews", with some members fearing more entrenched views could unhelpfully emerge in some schools, whilst others who did not share that view, commented that there are many worldviews, and there is a risk that a "pick and mix" approach to teaching some of these may be adopted.

Members agreed that much in the report is not fully clear, and the SACRE would require much more information and explanation before it could comment in detail.

These views were sent to NASACRE.

Following the conclusion of the Secretary of State for Education "that now is not the time to implement the recommended reforms", and given that we felt a number of our questions remained unanswered, we concluded that a watching brief on any further developments in this regard was all that was necessary. We were not prepared to promote the report recommendations.

Furthermore, we agreed that there were no implications arising for the SACRE at this stage, and in particular in respect of the Agreed Syllabus.

Equality

When using the locally Agreed Syllabus, the SACRE has made it clear that schools need to take into account the position that some faith groups take with regard to human sexuality, so that LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi sexual, and Transgendered) young people are not made to feel vulnerable when these issues are being explored.

8. SUMMARY

This report on the activities of the Bexley SACRE in the 2018-19 academic year. Much of the content appears to have been repeated in various forms for a number of years now.

There is a continuing, and worsening, climate for the public sector, teachers of RE, and SACREs, starved of support sometimes locally and most certainly by central government, with Ministers coming and going, yet all talking the same mantra that does nothing to prevent the marginalisation of RE. Responses from Ministers to SACRE letters of concern do little to change our view that there is no consideration being given to taking RE seriously. Maybe the new Ofsted inspection framework will improve matters.

The SACRE relies on financial and staffing resources that are already stretched and has reached a point where we feel we can no longer add to the burdens we already place on those people who do so much for us, either as local authority employees, our volunteer members or advisers.

It has been reported nationally that many state-funded schools are failing to meet their legal requirement to provide RE for all registered pupils, and limited research in Bexley suggests the situation may not be any different here. We suspect that our schools with a religious character are much more likely to comply with their legal requirements than schools without a religious character. However, we have insufficient resources, or the tools, to hold schools to account when they fail to comply with their legal requirements concerning RE, regardless of their status.

We are about to commence a review of the Bexley Agreed Syllabus, but this is a resource-intensive process, and the SACRE and Agreed Syllabus Conference will have to think very carefully how to approach this legal requirement, given that it is likely that only one third of our schools follow the current Syllabus.

Excluding GCSE Religious Studies from the EBacc has been demoralising for our teaching staff, it has devalued RE and has adversely impacted the academic, moral and social development of pupils. Falling examination entry numbers are a consequence of this short-sighted omission. In our society today there has never been a greater need for the new and enlightened perspectives that good RE can deliver.

Our SACRE and RE in the Borough benefits immensely from the contributions made by our teachers and representatives from faith groups. They voluntarily give their time and share their expertise for the benefit of our community. We are extremely grateful to them all in what is a difficult time for RE.

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