

Bexley Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Annual Report for the academic year 2016-2017



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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 2016 / 2017.

The agreed syllabus for Religious Education in Bexley has been in place for three years now. The feedback we continue to receive is positive and I am delighted that the hard work of the Agreed Syllabus Conference to fundamentally change the look and feel of the syllabus in this Borough is being so warmly rewarded.

I want to commend everyone involved in delivering the syllabus throughout our schools and to everyone who is involved in updating the online resources. The time and effort and hours of work put in is making a positive difference to the teaching of RE in our Borough and the spiritual and moral enrichment of young people.

Many of the Borough's schools are now part of Academy Trusts, and the SACRE has noted the impact that the academisation has had. We are mindful of the changing relationships between schools and local authorities and that this could have an impact on the influence that the SACRE has. As such, we are committed to working with our partners and we are keen to see primary and secondary providers working with us to deliver high quality RE in the Borough. The SACRE endeavours to keep a close relationship with all schools in the Borough and we are grateful for the expertise that teachers from all types of school bring to both the SACRE and to education in the Borough.

The September 2017 State of the Nation report into RE provision in secondary schools does paint a concerning national picture of neglect and a real risk of many students leaving school who are not religiously literate. In Bexley we are committed to working to achieve high standards of RE teaching in the Borough and have some excellent and outstanding examples which SACRE members have been pleased to be informed of and see. We do urge the Government and various national associations to look into the concerns raised about the support that can be provided nationally to schools and to SACREs to ensure that high standards of RE are delivered and that the status and importance of RE is lifted up. We feel RE as a subject should be held in higher regard.

RE has a vital and positive role to play in society and when we look at some of the challenges our country and world faces we can be confident that pupils who receive a high quality of RE in school can develop new and enlightened perspectives. RE opens hearts and minds to new ways of thinking and is unique in the way it links different parts of the curriculum with moral, ethical and philosophical matters and questions that strike at the core of our humanity with questions about who we are and what values we stand for.

That said, with the help of local authority colleagues a hugely successful conference on Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural Development was held in the academic year covered by this report. Feedback was extremely positive, and I must express my thanks to those who worked so hard to deliver the event.

I would like to thank our advisor, Virginia Corbyn, for our termly Newsletter to schools, which plays its part in raising awareness of the SACRE, its activities and events and resources available to our hard working teachers.

Awareness raising is, I feel, important to enable the SACRE survive and thrive, and will be important as we embark on a membership review and a re-think of our Constitution in the forthcoming year. We have a perennial problem in recruiting, and retaining, members to our Group A which, with demographics and the make-up of our Borough changing, it will be important to fully recruit to as we strive to ensure that we have balanced representation on the SACRE.

In the year in question, the SACRE was delighted to be able to review some more excellent RE GCSE, AS and A level results achieved by Bexley students in 2016. For 2017, 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. More about the Borough's Religious Studies examination results in the 2016-17 academic year is contained in section 3 of this report.

The SACRE shall be looking at examination results and trends in more detail later in 2017-18: it will be interesting to see what impact, if any, the changes to examination grading will have for subsequent years.

It is said every year, but it is truly merited: the Borough's RE Heads of Department and their teaching staff deserve a huge thank you for continuing to deliver excellent results in what continues to be an uncertain time for their subject. I said it in our last report, and I will repeat it again - it is my hope that reviews and announcements may lead to some future stability for RE, and for those that teach it.

Next year we will continue to maintain our working relationships with our schools and hopefully forge new ones with faith groups and centres across Bexley. And we will look to develop more work and ideas around community cohesion. But this is, as is the case every year, against a background of challenging times for the public sector.

We will also continue to monitor and, where necessary, correspond on and debate any relevant RE matters, be they of local or national relevance.

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 them and Council officers for their contribution to the work of the SACRE.



Cllr. David Leaf
Chairman of the Bexley SACRE



2. ADVICE TO STATUTORY BODIES

Our schools

There are in excess of 80 schools in the London Borough of Bexley, with three quarters being in the primary sector. The categories of school are wide ranging and varied - community primary, voluntary aided primary, Academy Trust, stand alone Academies, community special schools, all through schools and one free school - to name but a few.

Although for a number of years now our remit has not extended to all schools in the Borough – many are an Academy of some sort – 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. However, by June 2017 almost three quarters (72%) of all schools were academies, as opposed to maintained schools, and the local authority's influence, and ours, is diminishing.

Our profile

Notwithstanding the above we have in the past heard that some schools and teachers are not aware of the SACRE, or of its work. This was a concern and we felt that some awareness raising was required.

The SACRE is aware that the termly Newsletter prepared by our adviser assists with raising our profile, and we are pleased to hear that the Boroughs RE subject leads and teachers are committed to RE.

But there remains a clear need to raise our profile, and in March 2017 we secured a session at a Head Teacher's Forum meeting to explain our work and purpose: 30 (out of 80) schools were represented. At that meeting the Understanding Christianity teaching resource was also explained and explored. The SACRE has also agreed to widen circulation of the Newsletter to include 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

Feedback from teachers about the 2014 Agreed Syllabus continues to be positive and welcoming – see Section 4 of this Report. Since the Agreed Syllabus was launched, the SACRE has provided a support meeting every school term to help develop the knowledge, understanding and confidence of RE subject leaders in primary schools.

SMSC

The SACRE had decided that to complement RE in school, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development should be promoted, and as reported last year a number of discussions were held on this. Those discussions continued into 2016-17.

However, the main issue to report in this respect is the very successful Bexley SMSC Conference, which took place in January 2017. Attended by more than 40 delegates from Bexley and beyond (including Medway and Essex), the conference focussed on developing SMSC in education, and was aimed at enabling schools to demonstrate thoughtful and wide-ranging reflection and evaluation.

A key element for delegates was to promote understanding of how to facilitate pupils' SMSC development as a central part of a school's ethos and values through practical and interactive workshops, which included: developing inclusive and inspiring approaches; embedding SMSC values across the curriculum; educating for a safe, equitable and just society; and, auditing and evidencing the impact and effectiveness of RE provision.

A number of stall holders were also present, covering topics such as homelessness, equality, relationships and pupils in a challenging world to support and embed school provision of SMSC.

The conference offered delegates the opportunity to share information and consider robust evidence-based practice that makes a difference in the classroom and leads to respect, understanding and an appreciation of diverse viewpoints by the children in our schools. Teachers were encouraged to make SMSC integral to every lesson taught in Bexley's schools, and more so in every discussion about current events.

The SACRE was delighted to hear that the conference was very well received, and that the workshops on offer had been hugely welcomed. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, and the SACRE would like to take the opportunity again to express its sincere gratitude to the staff of the London Borough of Bexley and selected SACRE Members who were involved in setting up and delivering the event.

Beyond the conference, schools are being supported to network and collaborate, and to evaluate and then embed initiatives that successfully and consistently encourage their pupils to broaden their horizons. The SACRE will consider whether another similar event might be developed.

Training

The London Borough of Bexley and our adviser held three networking events for RE subject leaders – one in each academic term – covering topics such as the quality of RE and the RE Quality Mark, and the use of artefacts in teaching RE. We find that these events provide an excellent opportunity to support the teaching of RE, particularly in the primary sector.

There have no training events for Governors in the period of this report, although Governor training is something the SACRE will be discussing in the context of a number of national reports on RE that were published in 2017.

The SACRE is extremely grateful to the local authority staff, and our adviser, all of whom undertake a great deal of hard work to organise RE training and related events.

Although not discussed in any detail this year, the SACRE is aware of the Government's plans to cut the Education Services Grant, and it will wish to be fully appraised of the potential impacts for Bexley and the SACRE: it will be a topic for a subsequent meeting. However, it is of great concern that this will lead to a loss of approximately £1million for the local authority's support and infrastructure for education services, from which support for RE teachers and the SACRE is derived.

Newsletter

Through our adviser, the SACRE continues to produce a Newsletter every term. 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 is also intended to keep our schools informed about best practice. We are pleased to hear the regular and positive feedback from those who receive the Newsletter. The SACRE is grateful for the work that goes into the preparation of the Newsletter, and regards it as a valuable resource for our hard pressed RE teachers and subject leads.

Teaching resources

The SACRE was briefed on a new teaching resource – Understanding Christianity – and our adviser is an accredited trainer. We heard that, after undergoing the mandatory training, teaching staff elsewhere had found the resource to be worthwhile and very useful, so we sought opinion before coming to a view on whether or not to develop a viable model to roll out the resource Borough-wide.

The response was somewhat muted, and we heard that because of funding pressures there are no financial or staffing resources available to subsidise the roll out of the Understanding Christianity package, or the required accredited training, to the Borough's schools. The SACRE has decided to keep this under review.

That said, there may be an opportunity in the future to utilise a local charitable trust (which is also represented on the SACRE) who we understand are expecting to have an accredited trainer on their staff in 2017-18.

3. STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF PROVISION OF RE

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 these 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.

Last year we reported on the results achieved by the 2,586 students who sat a Religious Studies examination in Bexley in 2016.

2017 presented another set of excellent results for the Borough's students, and they, 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 will discuss these results in detail, and down to individual school level, in November 2017.

Data for the Religious Studies GCSE Short Course (and other short courses) has not yet been released at the level of detail the SACRE requires to fulfil its obligations to publish in this Annual Report, but that is outside our control and, rather than delay publication of the Annual Report yet again to wait for the required data, we will report on the 2017 Religious Studies Short Course results next year.

It is worth noting that the declining trend in GCSE entries in Bexley continues, down by 10%. It is unlikely that we will see a sufficiently significant increase in GCSE Short Course entries to change this trend.

It is pleasing to see that GCSE Full Course passes at A*-C and all passes A*-G have improved on last year, with all passes higher than at any time since 2011, and exceeding those achieved in England overall.

The SACRE will monitor AS and A Level entries in the next few years - AS Level entries were down 75% in 2017, and there was a 16% fall in A Level exam entries. It may be attributable to the way the AS Level is assessed, and the fact that the AS Level and A Level are now decoupled, meaning AS results will no longer count towards the A Level.

Although there is a relatively small cohort, some relatively minor changes appear significant in percentage terms. That said, the decline in the number of entries this year is not attributable to any statistical anomaly.

Following the GCSE reforms, and the new grading system from Summer 2018, comparisons with previous years may be neither appropriate nor possible.

It is the SACRE's firm opinion that whilst there is an apparent national trend to marginalise and squeeze the provision of RE in schools, which is in part reflected locally as resources on Bexley schools diminish, it is nevertheless the case that our schools and RE teachers and subject leaders are managing to maintain an excellent level of education and first class quality RE provision.

RE provision

As mentioned earlier, the SACRE is grateful for the work of our RE subject leaders and teachers in the Borough, and against a national picture of teachers and schools struggling to meet their legal obligation, as referenced in the September 2017 REC of England and Wales State of the Nation report¹, in Bexley we appear to be coping remarkably well.

Complaints

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

¹ The State of the Nation: A report on Religious Education provision within secondary schools in England, September 2017

**Religious Studies examination results: Bexley, 2007 – 2017
and comparisons with National (i.e. England) results**

(Data provided where available. 2017 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	1,975	1,533	77.6	1,960	99.2

GCSE Full Course	Entries	% Passes A* - C	% All Passes A* - G
Bexley	1,975	77.6	99.2
England	264,108	71.2	97.9

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					

GCSE Short Course	Entries	% Passes A* - C	% All Passes A* - G
Bexley	0		
England	0		

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	60	10	16.7	47	78.3

AS Level	Entries	% Passes A - B	% All Passes A - E
Bexley	60	16.7	78.3
England	9,806	40.0	90.7

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	125	71	56.8	125	100.0

A Level	Entries	% Passes A* - B	% All Passes A* - E
Bexley	125	56.8	100.0
England	22,000	54.8	98.7

Data Source: KS4 & KS5 Checking Exercise, SFR 57/17 and SFR 59/17 [November 2017]

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. 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.

Whilst considering how the Understanding Christianity teaching resource might impact on the Bexley Agreed Syllabus for RE, particularly if aspects of the resource could be incorporated into a refreshed Syllabus, SACRE members noted that because the Bexley Syllabus is developmental, with new resources being added regularly, aspects of Understanding Christianity could also be added, without the need for teacher training. The SACRE agrees that adding relevant modules of Understanding Christianity to the Syllabus would not unbalance it in favour of Christianity, and it would remain as inclusive as possible. We therefore agreed to consider if aspects of the resource could be added to an updated Agreed Syllabus when the next review is due.

Our next review

We will start the process of undertaking the next full review of the Agreed Syllabus by the middle of April 2019.

5. COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective Worship in Bexley

Following research and surveys as part of a review of Collective Worship in 2013, the SACRE concluded that provision of Collective Worship in the Borough's schools is adequate. The SACRE has neither the time nor the resources to conduct another review, but anecdotal evidence suggests that Collective Worship continues to appear to be inclusive, varied and of benefit to students, and so the view reached in 2013 has not changed.

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

Meetings of the SACRE are attended by a senior officer from the local authority's Directorate of Children and Education Services. 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. The SACRE has access to services provided by our RE Adviser, for up to 10 days a year.

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.

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.

Membership and Constitution

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

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

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

The terms of office for all Bexley SACRE members in Groups A to C inclusive will end in May 2018, although some may be subject to renewal thereafter. The membership was most recently reviewed in May 2014, and therefore some planning for a membership review early in 2018 has already commenced.

The SACRE Constitution was last reviewed in 2010. When considering the NASACRE Constitution the Chairman prompted some discussion about our own Constitution and, whilst our Clerk has confirmed that ours is lawful and fit for purpose, it could do with some modernisation. The Clerk is therefore conducting some research into other SACRE Constitutions and national guidelines, with a view

to providing members with proposals for a refreshed Constitution, to be considered alongside a membership review scheduled for 2018.

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 2016/17 academic year was as follows:

GROUP A (CHRISTIAN AND OTHER FAITHS)

Baptist	Mr Matthew Harris	Since June 2017
Baptist	Mr Gordon Raggett	
Buddhism	Vacancy	
Free Church (Evangelical Christians)	Mr Paul Weston	
Hinduism	Vacancy	
Islam	Mrs Faozia Rashid	
Judaism	Vacancy	
Methodist	Mrs Di Spowles	
Roman Catholic	Vacancy	
Sikh	Vacancy	

GROUP B (CHURCH OF ENGLAND)

Mrs Dorothy Jones	(Vice Chairman)
Rev. Scott Lamb	
Mrs Michelle Torrance	
Fr. Philip Wells	

GROUP C (TEACHERS IN THE AUTHORITY)

Mrs June Ben Rabah
Mrs Emily Champion
Mrs Judith Fudger
Ms Victoria O'Reilly
Ms Jaymie Pauvaday
Ms Cerys Siney

GROUP D (THE AUTHORITY)

Councillor Esther Amaning

Councillor Derry Begho

Councillor Christine Catterall

Councillor Ross Downing

Councillor Steven Hall

Councillor David Hurt

Councillor David Leaf

(Chairman)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

None

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (other than Councillor substitutes)

Dr Fazlur Rashid

Group A (Islam)

ADVISERS AND OFFICERS

Ms Virginia Corbyn

Part-time Adviser

Ms Jo Lakey

Head of School Improvement

Attendance by members during the 2016/17 academic year was as follows:

	Possible	Actual
Mr Gordon Raggett	3	2
Mrs Faozia Rashid	3	3
Mrs Di Sprowles	3	3
Mr Paul Weston	3	3
Mrs Dorothy Jones (Vice Chairman)	3	3
Rev. Scott Lamb	3	2
Mrs Michelle Torrance	3	2
Fr. Philip Wells	3	2
Mrs June Ben Rabah	3	3
Mrs Emily Champion	3	0
Mrs Judith Fudger	3	2
Ms Victoria O'Reilly	3	0
Ms Jaymie Pauvaday	3	1
Ms Cerys Siney	3	2
Councillor Esther Amaning	3	3
Councillor Derry Begho	3	2
Councillor Christine Catterall	3	2
Councillor Ross Downing	3	1
Councillor Steven Hall	3	1
Councillor David Hurt	3	2
Councillor David Leaf (Chairman)	3	3
Dr Fazlur Rashid (as substitute or observer)	3	3
Ms Virginia Corbyn	3	2
Ms Jo Lakey	3	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.

The SACRE has adopted a programme of member and external guest presentations, to enable us to learn more about RE teaching and the work of faith groups in our community. In the past year we received a very interesting and informative presentation from the only Church of England secondary school in the Borough, which included details of the extensive and charitable extra-curricular activities related to RE and SMSC.

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.

The contribution of the SACRE to the local authority agenda is primarily through the provision of RE resources and RE subject leader training and networking events, all reported elsewhere.

Community cohesion

The SACRE Chairman is actively working to widen the SACRE's activities in local authority and voluntary sector community cohesion activity. As a precursor to this the SACRE discussed community cohesion activities locally, and the outcome suggested that there is much more the SACRE could be informed about and involved with.

The Chairman met with officers of the London Borough of Bexley who lead on community cohesion matters and the Community Cohesion Engagement Group (CCEG), to ascertain if there was any synergy with the work of the SACRE and to explore opportunities for greater integration and information sharing. SMSC had been identified by the officers as a good resource for schools to consider community cohesion. The Chairman has been in touch with the Department for Education and the Chairman of the Education Select Committee on ways to promote RE, and has raised this also with the All Party Parliamentary Group on RE.

Consultations and correspondence

The SACRE has followed with interest the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (APPG) and noted the findings of their study into religious literacy, and noted the work of the Commission on RE. We discuss topics of interest in the regular issues of the NASACRE Newsletter. In one such instance we corresponded about a matter of concern contained in a summary of the Tell Mama Annual Report which, we felt, contained unfair assumptions about the role of RE

teachers who, from our experience, work extremely hard to deliver a balanced curriculum. In that correspondence we also took the opportunity to re-affirm our opinion that the marginalisation of RE and its exclusion from the English Baccalaureate is having an impact on good quality RE teaching and the amount of RE that pupils are exposed to.

To this end the SACRE wants Government to address the marginalisation of RE as a matter of priority, and to recognise the vital role RE plays in making a positive impact on society.

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 summarises the activities of the Bexley SACRE in the 2016-17 academic year, all against a backdrop of difficult times for the public sector, from which Bexley is not immune.

The SACRE calls 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 place on those people who already do so much for us, either as local authority employees, our volunteer members or advisers. This does impact on the amount of work we feel we can undertake in any one year.

The SACRE would like to record its disappointment with the Department for Education (DfE) for the severe delays experienced in the release of all the 2016 Religious Studies schools examinations data. Considering that it is a statutory requirement to include this data in our annual report, we ask the DfE to be more timely and efficient in releasing their data in subsequent years, to avoid the unacceptable delays encountered in 2016. Unfortunately, we find that not all GCSE Short Course data has been released for 2017, which means we are unable to report on it for our Borough in this Annual Report, as required by law.

We do feel that RE and the role of SACREs has been sidelined and urge the DfE to be more attentive to the role that RE and SACREs play. 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 and country and this contribution should also be recognised by the Government.

And finally, whilst accepting that the preparation of this Annual Report is a statutory requirement, we do find it frustrating that we are, in effect, spending time and resources on a document that is not formally read or acted upon, other than being published for information by the local authority and the National Association of SACRE's on their respective websites. We would value and welcome recognition, dialogue and input for the work that the SACRE undertakes, especially in view of the dedication and commitment shown by those who volunteer to support us.

The SACRE, along with others, has serious concerns that over a number of years RE is being marginalised and there is an apparent lack of interest and focus in the subject by successive governments. RE has such an important role to play in nurturing the intellectual curiosity of young people and their personal development to be side-lined or treated as an afterthought. We will continue to urge the government to do more to recognise and support RE so that it gets the attention and support it needs and the status of this subject is raised accordingly.

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