

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 12 March 2020

By: The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE

Title: Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE)

Purpose: To update Members on the role and work of the East Sussex SACRE

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People's Scrutiny Committee is recommended to comment on and note:

The work of SACRE in supporting schools and improving the quality of religious education, especially in maintained Secondary schools

1 Background

1.1 The role of SACRE

Since 1988 Local Authorities have had a statutory duty to establish a Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education.

2 The duties of SACRE

2.1 It is the duty of SACRE to advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters relating to religious education, collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

2.2 It is the duty of the LA to provide a locally agreed syllabus for religious education which must be reviewed every five years. Religious Education is a statutory element of the curriculum for all pupils which is determined locally. Academies are not obliged to follow the agreed syllabus but must provide religious education.

2.3 The Education Act 1996 requires SACRE each year to publish a report on standards in its schools and the actions taken during the year.

3 How SACRE works

3.1 SACRE meets each term and includes representatives from elected members who are appointed at the Annual Council meeting in May. Members places are currently allocated on a proportionate basis (3 Conservatives, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour)

3.2 SACRE currently has representatives from Christian denominations and other faith groups who represent the principal religions in the area. This includes the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Orthodox and Baha'i traditions. We also have a Humanist observer.

There is also a Church of England Group and a group of members from the Teaching Associations.

3.3 The SACRE Budget allocated in 2019/20 was £10,000, which represents £7,000 for Direct Support and £3,000 for Admin infrastructure. The budget funds a Religious Education Consultant and training costs. SACRE is directly funded by the DfE from the Central Schools Support Grant for which ESCC received £4.2m in 2019/20.

Income from training is no longer significant. The finances and logistics of arranging a large Teacher Conference once a year are proving very difficult. However, we are very grateful that the Lead Member for Schools agreed to provide a budget of £3500 for a pupil conference held in February 2020.

3.4 SACRE also deals with any complaints about RE.

4 Supporting Information

4.1 The National picture for RE

In 2018 the Core Report - A Commission on Religious Education was published.

The main recommendation was that SACREs should be reconstituted as Local Area Networks for Religious Education and Worldviews. This was subsequently adopted as policy by the Religious Education Council although it has by no means widespread support in the RE community. The Government has indicated it has no plans to legislate on this topic which would be necessary if SACREs were to change to the new format. However, the REC is proposing to pilot the concept with willing SACREs.

4.2 Ofsted Inspection

The new Ofsted framework for inspection of schools came into effect from September 2019. The new framework is substantially different from previous frameworks with judgements. There remains an overall effectiveness judgement alongside quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management. Under the section on quality of education the emphasis is on the broad and balanced curriculum and its intent, implementation and impact and how this meets the needs of all learners. With such an emphasis on the curriculum a number of reports nationally have been published (not in East Sussex) evaluating and in some cases being critical of the RE provision in some schools.

4.3 Religious education in East Sussex

Schools are required to publish curriculum overview statements on their websites and update them annually. Most schools publish an overview of the curriculum as a whole as well as subject overviews which gives an indication about how the statutory teaching of RE is being met.

It is only at KS4 that there is any externally validated data relating to exam entries and standards for RE. In 2019 we know that outcomes for the full course in RE improved very slightly with the percentage of pupils gaining grades 9-4 in East Sussex improving by 0.3% to 68.5%. Whilst national attainment 9-4 was higher at 71.1%, the East Sussex increase 2018-2019 was broadly in line with the national rise for state funded schools.

Attainment 9-5 declined in East Sussex from 59.4% to 55.8% in 2019. National trend data 2018 - 2019 for state funded schools is not available; however, 2019 national 9-5 attainment was 59.3% meaning East Sussex outcomes are 3.5% below national.

The short course data remains provisional. Short course GCSEs do not count towards schools' performance measures and are not included in the data we receive directly from the DfE. The numbers of students taking the short course are very small and the relevance of this data is limited. Nationally there has been a significant decrease in both entries and outcomes for the short course.

The Religious Education full course take up for East Sussex in 2019 was 25.5% of the total cohort, compared to 32.2% in 2018. The national figure for state funded schools' take up in 2019 was 38.9%.

The latest available data relating to entries for GCSE from NATRE (2018 outcomes) suggests that East Sussex was 113th out of 150 Local Authorities in terms of percentage of the cohort take up and entries for the GCSE full course.

4.4 **Professional Development:**

Events that were held in last calendar year include:

January 2019	Assessment of Religious Education – Primary 23 attendees
April 2019	Network meeting – focus on Islam – informal network event

4.4.1 **Current and future professional development:**

Over this last academic year there has been a drive to move towards more school led and school supported events to support the leadership and teaching of RE. The Secondary Improvement Board has commissioned different schools to lead subject networks. The network for RE subject leaders is led by Ratton School and Claire Ramalli as the subject leader and an SLE (Specialist Leader of Education) co-ordinates the secondary network. She reports that on average 10-12 subject leaders attend and they cover a range of topics related to the teaching of RE and the development of the curriculum.

St Marks Teaching School has also recently been commissioned to run subject leader networks for RE with the first ones planned for March 2020 and plans for a primary subject leaders' conference to be held in September 2020.

There is also a drive to recruit more SLEs to bring capacity for school to school support. We currently have 3 SLEs for RE, two secondary and 1 primary with other subject leaders coming forward to seek accreditation in the future.

4.5 **Implementing the Agreed Syllabus**

We have encouraged schools to use the Agreed Syllabus as legally required but there has been considerable challenge from Secondary Headteachers. There was a problem about the interpretation of the Agreed Syllabus since it seemed to imply that pupils once entered onto a course should take the appropriate examination. SACRE accepted that it could not make such a stipulation but after extensive debate did insist on the original intention that all should do RE and follow an accredited qualification.

The last Agreed Syllabus was adopted in 2017 and a new syllabus is not due until 2022. However we have started working with Heads on a process and the content for the next Agreed Syllabus.

- 4.6 A complaint was made about provision at a secondary school. Since the initial complaint the school has introduced significant improvements but the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are yet to be met in full. There are also concerns about RE outcomes at a number of other secondary schools. We have corresponded with the Regional Schools Commissioner who has been positive in his response.

It is difficult to ascertain whether all schools are meeting the legal requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. However it is difficult to find an exact measure of any failure but low numbers entered for the full RE GCSE courses should indicate at least a degree of questioning.

A schools working group has been established to gather views on the strengths and areas for development in relation to the Agreed Syllabus as well as give opportunities to develop and share good practice.

SACRE continues to be highly ambitious in wanting to work in partnership with schools to improve the quality and provision of RE teaching in all schools. Whilst appreciating the challenges schools face and the pressures on time and curriculum as well as the difficulties in appointing specialist teachers for RE, SACRE would like to see increasing opportunities for students to sit the RE GCSE and to have access to high quality curriculum provision and teaching in all key stages.

4.7 School Visits and Conference

School visits have continued but with less take up this year. The Chairman visited Seaford Head School and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman visited Harlands Primary School. We continue to pursue the aim of visiting as many schools as possible.

With additional funding supplied by the Lead Member, we held a highly successful Conference based around Holocaust Memorial day. 120 pupils from 11 different schools attended. All Year 8 pupils from Heathfield Community College who kindly hosted the event also attended part of the proceedings.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an annual report and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council.
- 5.2 The scrutiny Committee is asked to support SACRE in its ongoing work to seek improvements to RE provision.

Councillor Roy Galley

Appendix 1 – GCSE results