



THE LONDON BOROUGH
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DATE: 20 February 2018

To: Members of the
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Reverend R Bristow (Chairman)

Councillors Kevin Brooks, Robert Evans, David Jefferys, Keith Onslow and Sarah Phillips

Church of England: Mrs V Corbyn, Mr C Town and Reverend S Varney

Teachers: Mrs D Angell, Ms H Arnold and Ms S Odusola

Other Faiths: Mrs S Barnett, Mrs P Colling, Mr S Gupta, Mr R Hagley, Mr S Mahmood, Mr A Nandra and Mrs E Whitman

A meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education will be held at Bromley Civic Centre on **WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 6.00 PM**

MARK BOWEN
Director of Corporate Services

Copies of the documents referred to below can be obtained from
<http://cde.bromley.gov.uk/>

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9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 6th June 2018

Wednesday 31st October 2018

Wednesday 27th February 2019

All meetings to start at 6pm

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STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 6 December 2017

Present:

Reverend Roger Bristow (Chairman)

Councillors Robert Evans, Keith Onslow and Sarah Phillips
Mrs D Angell, Ms H Arnold, Mrs S Barnett, Mrs V Corbyn,
Mr S Mahmood, Mr A Nandra, Mr J Stone, Mr C Town,
Reverend S Varney and Mrs E Whitman

Also Present:

Carol Arnfield, LBB Head of Service for Early Years,
Schools Standards and Adult Education

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Jefferys, Patricia Colling, Ray Hagley and Sanjay Gupta. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Sarah Phillips.

Councillor Keith Onslow apologised for having to leave the meeting early due to other commitments.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

14 A) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH JULY 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

B) MATTERS ARISING

Minute 6: School Visits

The Chairman advised members that, due to his other work commitments, Mr Kieran Osborne had stood down from his role as LBB Educational Advisor. This had therefore impacted on the SACRE, and school visits had not been able to take place during the autumn term. The Chairman had spoken to the Headteacher at Cudham CE Primary School, who had invited SACRE

members to visit the school, and advised her that this would not currently be appropriate until a replacement Advisor with RE expertise was in post.

The Chairman advised SACRE members that in the absence of the LBB Educational Advisor, he would be drafting a letter encouraging schools to engage with the SACRE. This would be circulated in the School's Circular bulletin in January 2018, and would include a copy of the collective worship documents.

Minute 8: SACRE Self Evaluation

The Chairman informed SACRE members that information regarding Birmingham SACRE had proved difficult to source, as there was little information provided on the Local Authority website.

15 ORAL UPDATE & PUBLICATIONS

A) SACRE ADVISOR

The Chairman informed SACRE members that a replacement RE Advisor was needed, and it was intended that Bromley SACRE would have one. There were two options that he wished to put to members so that they could be considered and explored.

The first option was the suggestion that Bromley SACRE could share a RE Advisor with the London Borough of Bexley. These boroughs often worked together, and faced similar financial pressures. Bromley SACRE member, Virginia Corbyn, was the RE Advisor for Bexley SACRE, and the Chairman had spoken with her regarding this suggestion. The second option was to supplement the RE Advisor role, and provide support from elsewhere in the form of secondary RE teachers offering assistance. The Chairman had briefly discussed this with SACRE member, Jed Stone, who said he was keen to take on this role.

As school visits took place during the school day, SACRE members queried if a secondary school teacher could be spared by their school to attend. The Chairman responded that it was proposed that the school would be approached to release the RE teacher for the time needed for the visits to take place. Mr Stone said that he expected this to be possible, but noted that his Headteacher had not yet been approached regarding this.

One SACRE member considered that the precedent had been set by a previous RE Advisor, who had covered the same role for three of four boroughs. There had been a number of mergers of functions across Local Authorities, and they did not see a problem with Bromley and Bexley SACREs sharing a RE Advisor. The LB Bromley should not be looking to economise on the role, they should look to enhance it and offer a boost to the allowance. It was crucial to keep school visits going, and have the ability to offer advice to schools, and therefore both options were supported.

The Chairman advised SACRE members that a major piece of work that would need to be undertaken by the RE Advisor was the revision of the Agreed Syllabus. The Chairman had received an offer from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), to present to Bromley SACRE what they could offer in terms of a pre-produced syllabus that could be tailored to meet the needs of the LB Bromley. It was suggested that NATRE could be invited to attend the next meeting of the Bromley SACRE, but it was expected that what they would offer was likely to be expensive. Mrs Corbyn informed members that Kent County Council had recently purchased a RE syllabus from RE Today. She felt it was very good, but agreed that it would be expensive for the LB Bromley to purchase as the cost was dependent on the number of schools within a Local Authority. It was noted that the LB Bexley were in a similar position to the LB Bromley, and were also starting to revise their syllabus. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education advised members that the LBB School Improvement Team already had established links with the LB Bexley, and there was the potential to explore and capitalise on these. The LBB Head of School Standards, Julia Andrew, had also previously worked at LB Bexley up until a couple of months ago. Following a discussion, members considered that the offer from NATRE to present their syllabus was free, and that it would be a good idea to see their views. However, it was noted that NATRE were likely to share only a very small amount of information.

Another SACRE member said they would like to see Mrs Corbyn acting as RE Advisor to Bromley SACRE, as she had the knowledge and experience. However, they questioned if she would have the time to fulfil this role, and felt that what she would be required to do, would need to be clear. With regards to reviewing the Agreed Syllabus, it was suggested that the current syllabus should be looked at, to consider if it was fit for purpose. It had only been produced five years previously, and it would be a surprise if it was wholly unsuitable, and therefore the need for a new syllabus would need to be demonstrated. The Chairman responded that the previous RE Advisor had canvassed the schools regarding their thoughts on, and use of, the Agreed Syllabus, but had received little feedback. The feedback that had been collected indicated that the Agreed Syllabus was fit for purpose, but was cumbersome and needed streamlining.

Mr Mahmood noted that a previous RE Advisor had brought people together for round the table discussions, rather than just communicating via letters. This was felt to be much better for input and contribution, and it was suggested that a conference for Bromley teachers could be organised, which would allow the Local Authority to consider whether the Agreed Syllabus was fit for purpose. Councillor Evans suggested that a questionnaire regarding the use of the Agreed Syllabus could also be included in the letter that the Chairman was drafting to schools. The Chairman agreed that he would be happy to do this, and said that he liked the idea of getting teachers together to discuss what was happening in RE.

ACTION: Chairman

Mrs Corbyn informed members that an RE Advisor role consisted of two strands of advice, for primary schools and secondary schools, which both had

a different set of needs. As RE Advisor to Bexley SACRE, she covered the primary school strand, and secondary RE teachers did a lot of the secondary school work. Mr Stone advised members that there would be a meeting of the secondary school RE teachers taking place in February 2018, and he invited the Chairman to attend. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education enquired if there were any similar meetings for primary teachers to attend. In response, the teacher representatives said that the previous RE Advisor had facilitated groups for clusters of teacher to share ideas. It was noted that primary teachers were not RE specialists, and valued the sharing of ideas and gaining of experience. Mrs Corbyn said that a large amount of time in her role as RE Advisor for Bexley SACRE was taken up by organising primary teacher meetings and that the need for them remained.

(Councillor Keith Onslow left the meeting at 7.00pm)

B) HUMANIST REPRESENTATIVE

The Chairman advised members that Bromley SACRE had been contacted by Humanists UK with an offer to find a Humanist representative to sit on the SACRE. There had also been an approach from a member of the Baha'i faith who was interested in joining the SACRE. The Chairman asked SACRE members if they felt Humanist and Baha'i representatives were required, and if they should be appointed to Bromley SACRE.

Members questioned what proportion of Bromley residents were members of the Baha'i faith. It was felt likely that it would be very minimal, but that it should be explored and considered further. With regards to a Humanist representative, one member said they felt it was important to look at what Bromley SACRE needed in terms of representation. When the request for a Humanist representative had been made previously, a number of questions were raised; what is SACRE, and what is religion. It was considered that not having a faith meant Humanism was not a religion, and they therefore felt it was not appropriate to bring someone on to the SACRE as it seemed contradictory. Another SACRE member expressed that whilst they accepted this, the needs of young people should be considered. They needed an overview of more than just religions, it was about choices in life, and therefore there was a role on the SACRE for a Humanist representative. Members responded that this was correct, but felt that there were other forums for this such as PSHE.

(Councillor Sarah Phillips arrived at 7.05pm)

In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that SACREs could co-opt people with specific opinions if they felt necessary. The request had come following Sue Polydorou standing down as a Humanist representative, prior to which she had been a Councillor representative on the Bromley SACRE. The Chairman agreed that he felt the reason for not requiring a Humanist representative was in the name of the SACRE, highlighting the 'Religious Education' element. Humanism was a world view and position, not a religion,

and it would be unusual for a SACRE to specifically want to appoint a Humanist representative.

In response to a question, the Chairman advised members that the law stated that SACREs should have a membership that consisted of the major faith groups from the local community, and did not specify if they should, or should not, appoint a Humanist representative. It was noted that most SACREs would have members fulfilling other roles that may not hold a religious faith, and would therefore not have a specific need for a Humanist representative. Members considered that this was a decision that needed to be taken with great care, as it may invite other societies to want to join the membership of the SACRE. There needed to be clear guidance from Government regarding their role on SACREs; if it was just to hear their views, and without them having voting rights.

Following a discussion, members were reminded that this was just a consultation, and that they should not jump ahead. It was felt that in a couple of years' time other changes to legislation may be suggested. After this, decisions could be made, and it was agreed that Bromley SACRE should not be trying to break boundaries to be different. The Chairman advised members that similar comments had been made at the NASACRE AGM, where it had been felt that the Government were not focussed on making changes to RE in schools. Its current focus was on Brexit, and as a result there was little chance of policies being changed before 2019, but that the consultation may inform future policy changes. It was therefore agreed that a Humanist representative was not currently required on the Bromley SACRE.

ACTION: Chairman

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Chairman would advise Humanists UK that a representative was not currently required for the Bromley SACRE.**
- (ii) the Chairman would contact the member of the Baha'i faith who had been interested in joining the SACRE to advise that the need for a representative would be explored, and considered further.**

C) SACRE ANNUAL REPORT

SACRE members were informed by the Chairman that the SACRE Annual Report 2016-2017 was in progress. The report would be completed and submitted within the first three months of 2018. In response to a question, the Chairman advised SACRE member that the annual report would be submitted to; NASACRE, who would also publish it on their website; the Secretary of State for Education; and other relevant parties. The Chairman noted that the Commission on Religious Education's 'Interim Report: Religious Education for All' suggested that 'the Government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website'.

D) COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – INTERIM REPORT: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Commission on Religious Education was established to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for RE in schools in England. The review was designed to inform policymakers, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality and rigour of RE, and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. The Commission had now published its interim report, 'Religious Education for All', which set out initial recommendations alongside a range of issues on which Commissioners would seek to consult further before drawing any conclusions.

Members had been encouraged to respond to the consultation before the deadline on 4th December 2017. Commissioners hoped to receive feedback from as wide a range of people and organisations as possible, and the consultation would help to inform the final report of the Commission, due to be published in 2018. The Chairman advised SACRE members that the report was worth reading and considering, however it was noted that it was unlikely to produce legislation in the near future.

E) REC / NATRE – THE STATE OF THE NATION: A REPORT ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROVISION WITHIN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

The State of the Nation report looks at the extent to which schools in England meet their statutory requirements to teach RE. It provides a comparison between schools where the RE curriculum is determined in three different ways:

- 1) Schools, including some academies, following an RE curriculum determined by their religious character;
- 2) Academies and other schools such as Free Schools where the RE is determined by their funding agreements;
- 3) Schools where a locally agreed RE syllabus must be followed.

The report argued that it is vital that students receive high quality RE. It stated that it was neither educationally, morally or legally justifiable for schools to provide minimal time on the school timetable for RE, or to expect teachers with insufficient training or expertise to deliver the subject. It was also felt that it was not acceptable for any young person to leave school without the knowledge and skills delivered through RE which would allow them to understand the beliefs and values of the diverse British society, without which they would be ill equipped to take their place in the modern world. The Chairman advised SACRE members that as this was a lengthy document, a link had been provided to enable them to view and read it online.

16 SCHOOL VISITS

School visits had been discussed under minute item 14 B) Matters Arising.

17 SACRE DRAFT ACTION PLAN

SACRE members were provided with a copy of the SACRE Draft Action Plan for 2017-2018, which included suggested amendments discussed at the meeting on 12th July 2017. The Chairman asked members to consider how the objectives could be achieved, as it was noted that discussions regarding a replacement RE Advisor were still to take place. SACRE members were asked to go away and think about what they could do personally to facilitate the SACREs objectives, and contact the Chairman to advise him. Members would need to be available for school visits; and if a conference for RE teachers were to be organised, who could co-ordinate it and who would be willing to attend.

With reference to objective number 6 – *‘Provide information on curriculum to schools’*, teacher representatives queried the use of the Fronter system. Their schools did not use it, and felt it was becoming defunct, and it was therefore not the best channel to provide information. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education asked if there was another platform that the schools used that would be preferable. Teacher representatives said that if schools were part of Academy Trusts, they were likely to have their own hubs, so it was felt that information should be circulated directly to schools for them to decide where it should be stored and how it was accessed.

Teacher representatives said that the Revised Agreed Syllabus needed to be easy to access in all schools, and suggested that it should be published within a specific SACRE area of the Local Authority website. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education said that this would be explored – either within the LB Bromley website, or linked to the My Life website. Another alternative to websites could be a Google platform, which allowed data to be stored, and schools could be provided with membership details to access it. The Chairman noted that the current Agreed Syllabus had been provided to schools on a CD-ROM, and it was agreed that this would not be done in the future.

ACTION: LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education

18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Mahmood advised members that the prize giving for the Islamic Competition had taken place at Darul Uloom on Thursday 9th November 2017. The event had been as successful as ever, and the Mayor of Bromley had attended to present the prizes.

Thirty pupils, aged 11 and 12 year olds, from five schools; Hayes School, Harris Academy Orpington, Bullers Wood School, Bishop Justus CE School and Watford Grammar School for Boys, had taken part in this years' competition. The school projects were based on the concept of 'The True Meaning of Islam'. As this year had marked the 20th anniversary of the

competition, Mr Mahmood had invited previous winners back to attend the ceremony. Students from Bullers Wood School (2014), Hayes School (2015) and Harris Academy Orpington (2016), delivered mature presentations on the theme 'My Reflections about Islam'. The students were awarded with a special certificate for their contribution to the evening.

Mr Stone said that it had been a splendid evening, and the best prize giving he had attended. Mr Mahmood was thanked for making the competition such a success over the years, and members expressed their gratitude for a lovely event. This was echoed by the Chairman, who said it was a wonderful welcome from Darul Uloom. It had been good to hear what previous winners had gained from the project, and what it had taught them in their approach to, and reflection of, their learning.

The Chairman questioned why there was only one school faith event that took place across the borough. Mr Mahmood commented that in the time that he had been a member of Bromley SACRE, he could only recollect one other competition that members of the Jewish Community had organised for primary school aged pupils. It was noted that it took an enormous amount of work to organise school competitions, and they relied on enthusiastic teachers to encourage their students to be involved.

SACRE members suggested that as the Islamic Competition was for pupils in Year 8, an essay competition could be introduced for sixth formers to write a detailed and philosophical piece on 'the place of religion in the modern world'.

Reverend Varney informed SACRE members of some work that he had been involved in as part of Bromley's Three Faiths Forum. This was an active inter-faith group that had representatives from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths, who had met throughout the year. In terms of practical work, they had been collecting hampers for distribution through Citizens UK, to refugees that had been settled within the London Borough of Southwark.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 28th February 2018

All meetings to start at 6pm

The Meeting ended at 7.38 pm

Chairman

RE for all 14-16 year olds:

Evidence that it is possible to ensure that a school provides RE in accordance with their Agreed Syllabus

Very few people will have missed the headlines about Religious Education published in the last few weeks. These emanated from a “The State of the Nation” report from NATRE, the RE Council and RE Today that cites clear evidence based on the government’s own data that more than one in four schools are not providing RE at all and even more are not providing RE for all pupils.

Included in what followed on social media and in the press were statements from many different sectors within the world of RE that they were powerless to do anything about this situation. If a school, for whatever reason decided to reduce or even remove its RE provision, then no one could do anything about it unless the school were one of the ‘unlucky’ few (more in certain regions of the country) where an Ofsted inspector happened to pick it up.

NATRE has shown it is not true to say that nothing can be done. It is possible to hold schools to account for their RE provision and that power rests not with a large powerful organisation but with any individual prepared to write a complaint.

Last year, after very careful consideration the NATRE executive voted to do just that and effectively to test the complaints process. A local authority maintained school was identified where we believed we had clear evidence that the provision for RE was non-compliant with the law. The local SACRE¹ had tried to resolve the matter over an extended period but the school had refused to provide an accredited course in RE as was required by the Agreed Syllabus. NATRE therefore wrote a letter to the Headteacher beginning the first stage in the formal complaints process and copied in the Chair of SACRE.

The case was not simple because, as is often the case with legal matters, the result can rest on the use of very simple words. We have learnt that if a SACRE wants to secure accredited provision for all pupils (as was recommended in the Non-Statutory National Framework for RE, 2004) then words like ‘should’ and ‘recommend’ will not suffice instead ‘must’ and ‘obligatory’ need to be used.

Fortunately however, during the period when the complaint was being considered by the Secretary of State, it just so happened that the local Agreed Syllabus was being revised and the Agreed Syllabus Conference, decided to amend the wording to ensure that the words of their new document made their original intentions very clear.

To cut a very long story short, NATRE is pleased to report that the courses now being followed by all students at the school in question do include a GCSE in Religious Studies. Perhaps most significantly, the Department for Education has demonstrated its willingness to engage with this issue and therefore help secure provision for RE.

So what are the implications of this? NATRE believes they are as follows:

1. The requirements of any Agreed Syllabus, not just those that require an accredited course to be followed, are legally binding and schools can be required to follow them
2. SACREs are not powerless, they could choose to use this complaints process to hold schools to account
3. Those requirements of an Agreed Syllabus must be expressed in irrefutable language (see above) if any complaint is to be successful
4. Due to the current structure of accountability measures, schools are under enormous pressure to prioritise certain subject areas over others and therefore if a SACRE wants the programmes of study set out in the Agreed Syllabus to be met, then ‘recommending’ them is not guaranteed to secure them.
5. The complaint has tested the process for a local authority maintained school. What about an academy? The test for the complaint would not be based on the words in the Agreed Syllabus but those in the Funding Agreement. DfE guidance on the complaints process for academies can be read here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/557407/Complain_about_an_academy.pdf

¹ Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

6. This particular complaints process cannot effect change to the quality of provision

Appendix 1

Some implications of this case related to public examinations for Agreed and other syllabus writers

Department for Education comment:

This legislation [section 42 Education Act 1996 -see below] is still current and we looked at it in the context of the xxx case. Essentially, our interpretation is that we can expect a school to enter students who have followed the syllabus for an accredited qualification, but ultimately the decision is the school's as to who they think is ready and can be entered. An Agreed Syllabus itself does not have this power (it can advise/recommend that students are given the opportunity to take the exam, but can't require it).

In our view, the function of section 402 of the Act is to prevent schools from failing to enter pupils for exams who were expecting to be entered for them, and not as a general obligation to enter them for exams where it was understood by the student and the school that the subject would be studied without a view to taking an exam at the end of it.

However, if a school is genuinely teaching the content of an accredited qualification as a means of delivering RE, it would be unusual for them not to enter students for it except for good educational reasons.

The xxx Syllabus begins with 'It is both a legal requirement and an entitlement that all students (other than those withdrawn by parental request) study RE/RS at Key Stage 4 through an accredited course'. This isn't strictly right as it suggests there is a legislative requirement that a student study RE via an accredited course. In this case, it would have been more accurate to say, 'This Approved Syllabus makes it a legal requirement and an entitlement ...'.

Education Act 1996 Section 402

Obligation to enter pupils for public examinations <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/402>

402 Obligation to enter pupils for public examinations.

(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), the governing body of a maintained school shall secure that each registered pupil at the school is entered, at such time as they consider appropriate, for each prescribed public examination for which he is being prepared at the school at the time in question in each syllabus for that examination for which he is being so prepared.

(2) The governing body are not required to secure that a pupil is entered for any examination, or for an examination in any syllabus for that examination, if either—

(a) they consider that there are educational reasons in the case of that particular pupil for not entering him for that examination or (as the case may be) for not entering him for that examination in that syllabus, or

(b) the parent of the pupil requests in writing that the pupil should not be entered for that examination or (as the case may be) for that examination in that syllabus;

(3) For the purposes of this Chapter, a pupil shall be regarded as having been prepared at a school for a syllabus for a prescribed public examination if any part of the education provided with a view to preparing him for that examination in that syllabus has been provided for him at that school.

(4) In this Chapter references to a public examination (or a prescribed public examination) are references to such an examination as it applies in relation to persons who are entered for a syllabus for that examination with a view to meeting the examination requirements for that syllabus so as to qualify for assessment for the purposes of determining their achievements in that examination on any particular occasion in any year when an assessment takes place.

The Statutory Instrument that sets out these regulations can be read in full here: [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11279/3/The%20Education%20\(Prescribed%20Public%20Examinations\)%20Regulations%202010%20DRAFTfinal.doc](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11279/3/The%20Education%20(Prescribed%20Public%20Examinations)%20Regulations%202010%20DRAFTfinal.doc)

Appendix 2: How to make a complaint about the curriculum in a local authority maintained school

Follow the school's complaints procedure - every school in England must have one. The school complaints procedure should be published on the school's website

Follow the steps set out in that procedure in order. Only move on to the next step if your complaint is not resolved. Procedures may vary slightly but usually include the following steps:

1. Complain in writing to the headteacher. (see appendix 3)
2. Complain in writing to the school's governing body

After you've followed the school's complaint process

You can complain to the Secretary of State for Education by contacting the Department for Education (DfE).

5-6 Imperial Court, 12 Sovereign Road, Birmingham B30 3FH
Tel: 0121 458 3313 • Fax: 0121 285 1816

Dear xxx,

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) to make a **formal complaint** about the apparent shortfall in the provision for Religious Education at xxx. NATRE is a subject association and works through an elected national executive to promote high quality provision for Religious Education in schools around the country. Over recent years we have been monitoring and responding to changes to the level of provision in some schools and colleges using different sources of information such as GCSE results, school workforce data and school websites. We are sharing our findings in regular meetings with the Department for Education and the HMI at Ofsted, all of whom are taking a keen interest.

We believe, as I am sure do you, that Religious Education is a vitally important subject in the school curriculum. Religious literacy is essential as we prepare pupils for life in modern Britain and the specific knowledge, understanding and skills provided by a rigorous course in Religious Education make a significant contribution to building positive community relations.

As you know, your school, as a local authority maintained school is bound by legislation to make provision for Religious Education for **all pupils on the school roll** in accordance with your Local Agreed Syllabus – in this case, the xxx Agreed Syllabus. The document specifies (page xx) that for key stage 4 provision must meet the following requirements: **“for all students aged 14-16 years, at least one course in Religious Education or Religious Studies, leading to a qualification approved under Section 96 should be provided”** In effect this means that all pupils must follow either a GCSE short or full course in Religious Studies. We appreciate that only the full course now counts in school performance measures but that does not affect the legal requirement for RE nor the fact that the short course counts for the individual pupil and is recognised by employers as valuable in its own right.

According to the **xxx** options booklet for your school Religious Education does not appear in the core curriculum for Key Stage 4, is not listed as a compulsory subject on page x and appears only as an option at full course. I can see that you offer a critical thinking course which does not lead to an examination. The options presentation for **xxx** appears to follow the same pattern and omits Religious Education from the core curriculum described on slide 10.

This appears to show that in relation to the students currently in year 10, xxx is in breach of the Statutory Agreed Syllabus at least at Key Stage 4 and that if the current plans are put into effect, the same situation will exist next year. The Statutory Agreed Syllabus is absolutely clear. Students must follow a nationally accredited course **in Religious Education or Religious Studies** leading to an accredited qualification. A course in ‘Critical Thinking’ for example does not meet this requirement.

Please can you respond to this complaint and let me know what steps you intend to take to ensure the school is no longer in breach of this statutory requirement?

With regards,

Deborah Weston

Deborah Weston OBE
Research Officer
National Association of Teachers of RE

cc. xxx (Chair of Governors)
xxx SACRE Consultant for Religious Education
xxx Chair of xxx Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
xxx Chair NATRE chair@natre.org.uk
xxx Executive Officer NATRE exec@natre.org.uk

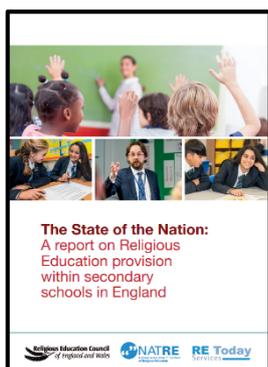
Why SACREs should complain to schools when they neglect RE



I think it is reasonable to say that almost all SACREs undertake activities that involve the monitoring of provision for RE as part of their work. This monitoring supports one of the main functions of SACRE and allows them to carry out the statutory duty to advise the local authority (see figure 1 below). These monitoring activities often include, reviews of Ofsted reports, reviewing published information on school websites, analysis of GCSE entry and performance data, consideration of school workforce data and visits to schools to observe RE.

to advise the local education authority upon such matters connected with ... religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit ...

Figure 1: Education Act 1996 c.56



All these are valuable activities and in the past, a report to the local authority from SACRE advising them of concerns about RE in a school would usually lead to the resolution of the problem. Sadly, for many reasons, that is no longer the most common pattern. The State of Nation Report¹ (left) makes clear that there are serious problems with the level of provision for RE in secondary schools in England and we know that this situation is almost certainly mirrored in primary schools.

What has changed?

In recent times, even when advice has been offered to a local authority or academy trust that a school is not meeting its legal responsibilities in relation to RE, it is increasingly common for no action to have been taken that results in those schools amending their provision. Chairs of SACRE sometimes write to Headteachers and/or a Governing Board but many annual reports that I have read recently as well as minutes of meetings indicate that the names of the same schools often appear as causes for concern year after year. This suggests that little has changed. In the case of Academies, local authorities have limited authority, but even for LA maintained schools without a religious character, the local authority officer is in an unenviable position since the possibility of academisation inevitably changes the nature of their conversations with school leaders.

A cloud of powerlessness seems to have descended over SACREs and, a myth has been shared suggesting that no one can do anything about the situation. **Put very simply, this is just not true.** The action I want to suggest is not without risk, but it is possible to effect change. Schools that are bound by the local agreed syllabus can be held accountable for their legal responsibility to 'make

¹ <https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free Resources/SOTN RE 2017 Report web v4.pdf>

provision for Religious Education in accordance' with that Agreed Syllabus. NATRE has tested this process and shown that the Department for Education is ready, willing and able to act.

One note of caution about this exercise. Before making any complaint, it is wise to check the language of the legal requirements of your Agreed Syllabus. For example, if the stated requirement is that "schools *should* make provision ..." that is not the same as "It is mandatory for ..." or "It is a requirement of this syllabus that schools must ...". If SACRE "recommends" that, schools can choose not to follow that recommendation.

What can be done?

Step 1

If, as a consequence of a monitoring exercise, a SACRE becomes concerned about a school, then the first step will probably continue to be to send a letter to the school. Monitoring data can sometimes be misleading, and the school leadership team should obviously have the opportunity to respond. A suggested template for such a letter to a LA maintained school and an academy can be found on NATRE's website in the section "Being on your local SACRE" (additional Documents to support you) [here](#).

Step 2

If the Headteacher responds to the first letter, then SACRE will need to consider if the response is satisfactory. i.e. that the school is actually compliant with the Agreed Syllabus. If not, then a second letter will need to be written. On this occasion, the phrase 'formal complaint' will need to be mentioned. A suggested following up letter for such a letter can be found [here](#).

Step 3

If the Headteacher failed to respond to the follow up letter, then SACRE will need to consider making a formal complaint. A case study of the use of the complaints process can be examined [here](#). Appendix 2 explains how to use the complaints process. Appendix 3 is an exemplar letter beginning this process.

What are the challenges of using the complaints process?

Making a complaint against a local school may feel counter-intuitive to a SACRE, especially when so much effort is made to build relationships at all levels. I want to argue that the current situation for RE in English schools constitutes extreme circumstances and in many areas this means that extreme measures are justified. In the end, it is the students that are losing out as a consequence of schools failing to make provision for RE for all of its pupils or where tokenistic levels of RE are provided that fail to prepare pupils for life in the modern world.

What are the challenges of not using the complaints process?

If in one in four schools in England, there is no provision for RE at all, there cannot be many SACREs that are not aware of a school that is either partially or completely ignoring their responsibilities for pupils' RE. NATRE receives regular calls for help and support from teachers who are having teaching hours cut. Those people who follow RE social media, can be in no doubt of the scale of the problem. I believe that without action from all sectors of the RE community, the situation can only get worse. SACREs are arguably the best placed to deal with this issue and I believe it is important for them to do so to demonstrate their vital role in securing effective religious education for the children in their local area.

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SACRE DRAFT ACTION PLAN 2017-2018
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 Meeting preparation Report writing Meeting attendance Minute taking Publication of meeting agendas and minutes	Clerk, Chairman, Education Services	Termly committee meetings	Effective meetings with action points carried out. Members have a working knowledge of the syllabus and an understanding of the responsibilities of SACRE
2. SACRE consider reports and initiatives from NASACRE	Consider relevant material from NASACRE	Chairman and nominated rep	As information is published	Attendance at relevant NASACRE meetings Minutes record discussions
3. Produce annual report of SACRE.	Collate information and write report based on NASACRE template	Education services to write Chairman to read Clerk to circulate.	Substantially completed by end Dec 2017, and submitted within first 3 months of 2018	Completed on time and copies provided for SACRE members, Director, Assistant Director, CYP portfolio holder, libraries, schools and their governing bodies. NASACRE and the secretary of State for Education
4. Annual engagement with local schools to observe and understand Religious Education Collective Worship approaches	1. Annual letter to schools - encouraging them to engage with the SACRE and advise of available resources 2. Invite school visits 3. Members undertake school visits 4. 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. Share best practice with local SACREs	Invite local SACREs to present once a year, providing an update on how they are doing	Chairman / Clerk	Annually	
6. Provide information on curriculum to schools	Upload resources onto the Fronter system.	Education services	Occasional updating	Schools able to access syllabus
7. Evaluate SACRE work and establish priorities	Item at each meeting - using the NASACRE self-evaluation document	All SACRE members	Summer term meeting	Evaluation identified success criteria are met
8. Preparation of Revised Syllabus	Revision of the current Bromley Agreed Syllabus for RE	Education services	By September 2018	Revised Agreed Syllabus for RE available for schools from 1 Sept 2018

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