

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage
and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

The meeting will be held at **6.00 pm** on **9 January 2019**

Committee Room 4, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL

Membership:

Committee A:

Mrs S Lawson, Free Church Christian Member
Mr P Anderson, Free Church Christian Member
Mrs M Shepherd, Diocese of Brentwood, Roman Catholic Member
Mr A Rashid, Muslim Member
Miss A Ahmed, Muslim Member
Ms H Kaur Takhtar, Sikh Member
Mr T Ojetola, Pentecostal Member
Mr A Kariyawasam, Buddhist Member
Vacancy, Jewish Member
Vacancy, Hindu Member

Committee B:

Rev.J Guest, Church of England Member
Vacancy, Church of England Member
Vacancy, Church of England Member
Vacancy, Church of England Member

Committee C:

Mrs R Gedalovitch, Teachers' Associations
Ms H Martins, Teachers' Associations
Ms A Harris, Teachers' Associations
Ms J Culloty, Teachers' Associations
Vacancy, Teachers' Associations

Committee D:

Local Education Authority
Councillor M Kerin
Councillor S MacPherson

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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2	Minutes	5 - 10
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education meeting held on 17 October 2018.	
3	Items of Urgent Business	
	To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4	Declarations of Interest	
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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Tisha Sutcliffe, Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **3 January 2019**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

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What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 17 October 2018 at 6.00 pm

Committee A: Mr P Anderson (*arrived at 6.15pm*), Ms H Kaur Takhtar, Mrs S Lawson and Mr T Ojetola

Committee B: Rev J. Guest and Rev D. Bates

Committee D: Ms A Winstone

Apologies: Councillors Martin Kerin and Sue MacPherson, Ms M Shepherd and Ms J Culloty

In attendance: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education
Tisha Sutcliffe, Democratic Service Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

9. Minutes

The meeting was declared inquorate as there was no representation from Committee C. Due to this it was agreed that the meeting would continue informally and recommendations put to members at the next quorate meeting of SACRE.

The Chair also noticed an error on Page 4 of the Minutes point 26, which will be corrected and prepared for the upcoming meeting in January.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education introduced the Appendices on the self- evaluation form on Religious Education in Secondary and Primary Schools. Members discussed the completed self-evaluation form commenting that there were some positive feedbacks received from specific schools although the majority of schools had failed to share relevant information. SACRE members were aware of who the Religious Education leaders were within each school, and this gave SACRE a direct contact link to the Schools which they agreed they should feedback to each school.

SACRE Members shared slight concerns with limited funds for extra bibles and they were conscious the students were not receiving books with different faiths.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education mentioned the importance of a Conference, however there were no funds to organise this. Ms Winston, School Improvement Manager agreed to fund a Conference as it would remind individuals of the importance of Religious Education in Schools.

SACRE members advised during the discussion on the self-evaluation form that some schools had included a long term plan which was positive to see. There were concerns that it had been difficult to discover how much Religious Education was being done in primary and secondary schools. It is not clear if enough time is being focused on Religious Education, and the majority of the forms had advised that there were no visitors or visits regarding Religious Education.

SACRE members felt it was positive that most schools had two teachers with a post A – Level qualification on Religious Education.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education gathered the information on the self-evaluation as a guide of what is being taught, She wanted SACRE members to feedback what their conclusion was on the responses.

Mr Ojetola felt the response from schools was positive and it was a good idea to have them complete the form. The Chair advised that this task had been done face to face with two separate schools and he felt it was positive with one school however the second school struggled which could have been due to the lack of information agreed on the syllabus.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education pointed out that the agreed syllabus should be raised with schools as there are a lot of people who are unaware that Religious Education is still being used. The Chair commented that SACRE members need to explore whether schools in Thurrock are using the agreed syllabus and if they were failing to use the agreed syllabus then it should be revealed as to why. The Associate Adviser for Religious Education made a complaint to the Secretary of State expressing SACRE concerns with the inadequate amount of Religious Education being used in schools.

Mr Ojetola said it would be positive if the schools who had taken the time to complete the self-evaluation form were acknowledged.

It was noted that the Teaching Association representatives did not receive their agenda's prior to the meeting as they were sent directly to the Education department at Thurrock Council.

10. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

12. Election of Chair

Nominations were invited for the election of the Chair. Mr Ojetola made a nomination for Reverend J. Guest to remain as Chair for Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education Committee, this was seconded by Reverend

D. Bates and it was agreed by all Committee members. Reverend J. Guest accepted the nomination to remain as Chair for a further one year.

13. Commission on Religious Education

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education presented the report to those present, explaining the Commission on Religious Education had been established to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for Religious Education.

The report was the remit of the commission to consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education, To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE, and the barriers that currently limit it. To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE and to ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education referred SACRE members to appendix A of the report regarding the recommendations one being the name of the subject to be changed to Religion and Worldviews, and it should be reflected in all subsequent legislation and guidance.

SACRE Members disagreed with this recommendation and the Chair stated that if the name was going to be changed it should simply be religion and none religion otherwise it may exclude other religions and faith, which he felt was extremely disappointing that faith was not being included.

SACRE Members agreed that it would be unacceptable for Religious Education to be removed as it enables people to hold a religion. They felt that worldview would be a decision made by individually.

SACRE Members felt that religious education should be taught to show awareness to children and give them a full understanding of other religions and worldview would never be defined and it distracts the objective of what the Committee is trying to make clear. The title worldview would be a broad title and they felt a new title should be considered and more research should be gathered from different religious groups.

The Chair asked if a criteria had been set up for non- religious groups, it was confirmed by The Associate Adviser for Religious Education that the non-religious groups in Thurrock were limited although Essex Community is very active.

SACRE Members highlighted that there should be a national requirement for teaching religious education in schools as all schools are expected to teach this subject. The Associate Adviser for Religious Education agreed it was very important for the academies to be clear on what is being taught. Every child should have full access to religious education.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education agreed with Members that it should be consulted although there is no duty to consult. It was highlighted that the report referred to 9 individuals with education background are able to write the curriculum.

SACRE Members were pleased with recommendations 9 of the report on page 21. It was stated that the 2019 framework would be looked in to and progressed as there is 44% of schools KS3 are doing religious education and 3.6% are spending 1 and half hours on religious education.

There are concerns with the lack of awareness for other religions as it has increased to 55% of hate crime on religious people.

14. Monitoring provision for Religious Education in Thurrock Schools

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education presented the report to those present, in order to discharge the legal duties. SACRE is to monitor the provisions for Religious Education in the local area where it delivers in accordance with the local agreed syllabus. The report included data from the school workforce census data conducted in November 2016 and 2017 and identifies the number of secondary schools that do not appear to be meeting their legal duty to provide Religious Education for all pupils.

SACRE Members recommended for a letter to be sent to the schools in regards to the spreadsheet on page 28 Appendix A of the report.

15. Review of Membership and attendance

During the meeting there was a discussion around the Membership and attendance of the Councillor from the Local Authority as it was highlighted all three nominated Councillors had failed to attend the Committee on two separate occasions. The Chair expressed his concern with the lack of engagement from the Councillors and wanted to make it clear that they have a requirement to attend the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education Committee.

Ms Weston agreed with Democratic Services that this would be discussed following the meeting and a letter would potentially be sent to the Leader of the Council to ensure that they attend upcoming Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education Committees.

16. Any Other Business

There were no items of other business to be discussed.

The meeting finished at 8.02 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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9 January 2019	ITEM: 5
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education	
Integrated Communities	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Deborah Weston: Associate Adviser for Religious Education	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills	
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

In April 2018, the government published an “Integrated Communities Green Paper” that *“invites views on the government’s vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.”* This paper invites members of SACRE to consider what recommendations it might make to the council to revitalising religious education in Thurrock so that it might play its part in improving community integration, locally, regionally and nationally.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

- Requests that an item be placed in the Headteachers’ Bulletin
- Reminding schools of their statutory duty to promote community cohesion
- Requests schools share evidence of good practice that might be circulated to others as examples of how religious education supports this work.
- Inviting them to send a delegation of children from their school to a SACRE Youth Conference: ‘Respect for all’ on Wednesday, 5th June at Thurrock Adult Community College, Richmond Rd, Grays RM17 6DN
- Conducts an investigation into the nature and extent of pupils being withdrawn from religious education or part thereof

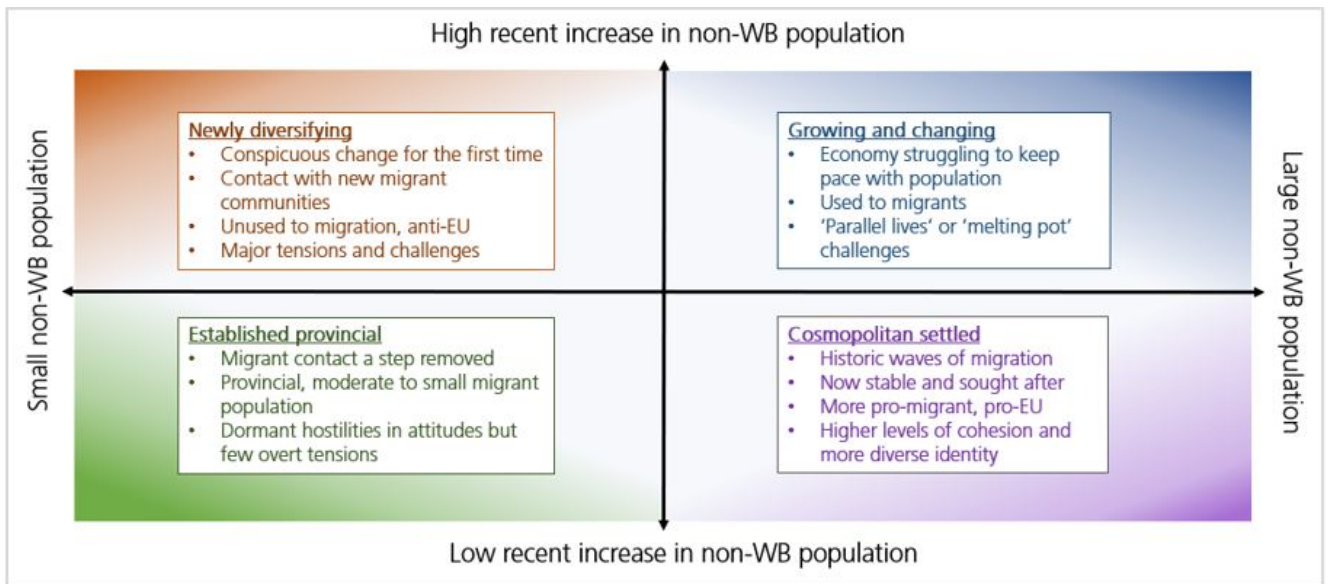
2. Introduction and Background

The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper focuses on addressing those factors which the available evidence suggests act as the main drivers for poor integration. These are set out in the diagram below.

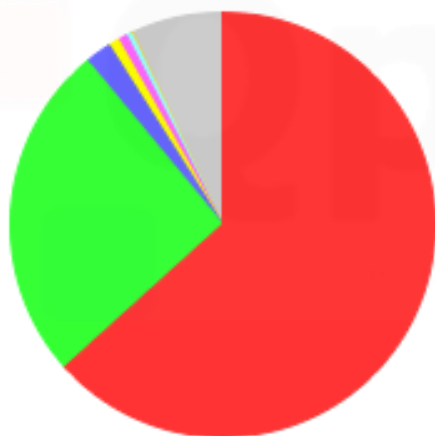


The rapid changes to the levels of ethnic and religious diversity in Thurrock would suggest that it has certainly been affected by the first of these seven factors: “Level and Pace of migration”. There are several other aspects including 6. ‘Personal, religious, cultural norms, values and attitudes’ that are directly relevant to religious education.

The academic Eric Kaufman writing about the 2008 BNP vote in the GLA elections makes a “distinction between *levels* and *changes* in diversity at the local level” Kaufman suggests that “The former dampens anti-immigration feeling while the latter elevates it.” This helps to explain why areas with larger non-white British minorities tend to experience fewer issues associated with tensions or even hostility to immigration. A recent article by the campaign company [here](#): presents this diagram created by C. Clarke IPTC Photo Metadata. Thurrock is mentioned in this article in the ‘newly diversifying’ category and therefore likely to be experiencing ‘major tensions and challenges’.



Almost one in five people in Thurrock recorded their ethnicity as non-White British in the 2011 census. The level of diversity has increased by over 10% in a decade. Our young population is becoming more diverse. Data from 2012 shows 26.5% of Thurrock school-aged children are from a black and minority ethnic group, compared with 19.1% of the total population. The religious make up of Thurrock is 63.3% Christian, 25.7% No religion, 2.0% Muslim, 0.8% Sikh, 0.7% Hindu, 0.4% Buddhist, 0.1% Jewish. 9,895 people did not state a religion. The change in the level of religious diversity in ten years is significant. See appendix B.



1.	Christian	63.30%
2.	No religion	25.70%
3.	Muslim	2.00%
4.	Sikh	0.80%
5.	Hindu	0.70%
6.	Buddhist	0.40%
7.	Jewish	0.10%
8.	Other	7.00%

The reduction of hate crime remains a priority in Thurrock. According to the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment [here](#), where Hate Crime offences due to religion were able to be broken down into religious type (in 85.7% of religious Hate Crime offences recorded), the highest amount of offences were against Muslim victims.

SACRE is aware that some schools in Thurrock have experienced these tensions directly. For example, parents have objected to the teaching of Islam and withdrawn children from lessons and visits to places of worship. The outcome for those children, who arguably are those that most need to be taught about Islam, are no longer being taught about it. It is not clear whether or not this is a widespread issue in Thurrock, but it is clear that SACRE needs to investigate. Schools have a statutory duty to promote community cohesion. (Education and Inspections Act 2006).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 SACRE members are invited to discuss the issues raised above and the role of religious education as one of the areas of the curriculum that might improve community cohesion/integration in Thurrock. This discussion will be informed by the text above and the article in appendix A by Dr Joyce Miller.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 SACRE advises the council on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions. The issue of community integration is not only a statutory duty for schools but a priority for the local community, therefore SACRE should advise on how religious education can play a part.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 SACRE advises the council on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions. The issue of community integration is not only a statutory duty for schools but a priority for the local community, therefore SACRE should advise on how religious education can play a part.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager Corporate Finance

Part funding for the conference has been agreed with the school improvement team of Thurrock Council.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in s391 of the Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools which do not have a religious character and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
(Community Development & Equalities Manager)

This report focuses on issues of community integration/ cohesion which is a strategic priority for Thurrock Council. The recommendations aim to help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8.0 **Appendices to the report**

8.1 Appendix A – Religion, Education, Community and relations

8.2 Appendix B – The changing profile of Thurrock in relation to affiliation to religions and beliefs

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

Religion, Education, Community and relations: some reflections on the APPG inquiry

Process and product

This paper contains some reflections on the key themes of the report on religious education (RE) and good community relations commissioned by the All Party Parliamentary Group on RE (APPG). That report and the transcripts of the three oral-evidence sessions, held between December 2013 and February 2014, can be found at <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg>.

The document has a sub-heading: 'Cohesive schools - Cohesive communities - Cohesive society' (the titles that were given to the evidence sessions) and it is arranged under three headings:

- The Implementation of Law and Policy
- Learning in Religious Education
- Teaching Religious Education.

Each includes, in brief, the evidence that was received and the desired outcomes that can arise; it is not the purpose of this paper to explain the process or to reiterate either the evidence or the outcomes but rather to offer a commentary and reflection on RE and its contributions to good community relations, with some further questions to complement those set out at the end of the summary report.

These reflections are aimed primarily at fellow educationists with the aim of generating wider discussion on the range of issues that arose during the inquiry.

Introduction

Religious education and community relations have a great deal in common. They both have a range of names: RE used to be RI (Instruction) and then it was RK (Knowledge) and now it may be RS (Studies) or Theology or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics or part of combined humanities. 'Community relations' has been called community cohesion or social cohesion. These differences are not simply about semantics or current discourse: they reflect deeper meanings and emphases on the part of their users. Take, for example, the aims, purposes and content of religious education – the debate continues, as we have seen in recent responses to the RE Review. Similarly, community cohesion is a contested concept: seen by some as having a racialised agenda and by others as part of Prevent, it is sometimes differentiated from social cohesion by its lack of focus on social and income inequality.

A number of important commonalities exist between RE and community relations in the context of the education of children and young people. First, there are shared desired attitudes such as openness, empathy and courage (addressing difficult controversial issues requires courage on the part of both teachers and pupils). There is the development of skills common to both, including those required for interpretation, critical engagement, reflection and dialogue. There are also shared concepts, particularly identity and community and the plural versions of those terms. Affirming pupils' identities and working successfully with their local communities should be at the heart of schools' energies, for if these are not understood and affirmed how can real learning and nurture take place? By definition, this requires teachers and others to acquire a professional understanding of the key words used in the title of the APPG inquiry: religion, education, community and relations and this paper now sets out to explore each of them. It draws on the evidence given (both oral and written), on some of the relevant literature and makes links with other current initiatives.

Religion

A number of speakers drew attention to aspects of the term 'religion', a number of analyses were offered and questions were raised. Three ways of conceptualising religion were suggested:¹ propositional belief - religion is conceived as a set of propositions and to be religious is to subscribe to a set of propositional beliefs; tradition - religion is explained in terms of what people do, what it means to be religious in terms of everyday actions in the world; existential - where religion is about being, to be religious is to live with a kind of awareness, a kind of alertness. This typology raises questions for teachers of RE and others, including members of Agreed Syllabus Conferences:

- How far do you agree with this conceptualisation?
- If this way of conceptualising religion is helpful, how can it support RE?
- Is the RE that is taught in schools dominated by religion as propositional belief?
- Or is there an emphasis on existential questions?
- Or is the focus on religions as traditions?
- Is there a broad and balanced view of religion that underpins curriculum design in the subject?

There are further questions too:

- Is Britain a 'Christian country' as the Prime Minister would have it?²
- Or is it a post-Christian country, as a former Archbishop of Canterbury would have it?³
- How useful are the data about religion and belief from, for example, the census or the British Social attitudes surveys?

Religion and belief in society are in the process of rapid change and there are debates about secularity and religion:

- Is secularity opposite to religiosity?
- Are they different points on a changing continuum?
- Are they fluid and sometimes convergent ways of being?

¹ This came from Patricia Hannam's evidence. See:

http://religiuseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014_01_27_tra.pdf

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27099700>

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/27/britain-post-christian-says-rowan-williams>

⁴ See, e.g., Spencer and Welden, 2012; and Woodhead and Catto, 2012

The evidence from recent research would suggest that our society is both religious and secular and individuals combine both in their own lives.⁴ Religion as a global phenomenon is different from religion in the western world: the decline in active membership of religious communities in the west is not reflected globally. Further, the religious groups that are thriving in the west are the charismatic and independent churches – mainly independent Pentecostal churches. What we believe has changed too: belief in a personal god has fallen but belief in a spirit or life force has doubled and so the relationship between religion and spirituality is also much disputed.⁵

Statistics about religious identity are dissected and argued over including, for example, the figures that were offered to the inquiry: the British Social Attitudes Survey of 2008 which showed that religion, for many citizens, is a – and sometimes the – salient feature of their identity:

- 33% said that religion is an important aspect of their life
- 61% said that religion is an important aspect of how they define themselves
- 90% who class themselves as Asian said that religion is important to them
- 93% of Muslims and 90% of Sikhs said that religion is an important part of their identity.

Given the many challenges that face RE teachers now, how can we expect 'religion as it is lived'⁶ in Britain and globally to be understood and taught by teachers? That will be difficult but how can RE fail to address the ever-changing, organic nature of the topic that is supposed to be at the heart of our subject?

Surprising evidence on this was presented to the inquiry.⁷ In a survey of 627 RE subject leaders it was found that learning about religions was rated as very important by only 27% of primary and 24% of secondary subject leaders. With regard to learning about a specific religion: only 33% of primary teachers and 28% of secondary teachers rated it important. In some respects these are extraordinary findings: teachers of RE who don't rate the teaching of religions as important! What then do they consider to be important? In primary schools a high priority is given to character formation and in secondary the focus is on ultimate questions and thinking critically about religion. A question for RE is whether these really have to be alternatives and how far agreed syllabuses support teachers in constructing their own schemes of work to create a balanced curriculum.

A further perspective was offered: the religion that features in RE classes is often religion as framed by the preoccupations of secular public discourses, such as fundamentalism, science versus religion, or religion and medical ethics. What is missing is religion as practised by individuals and communities - 'religiosity'. The survey also demonstrated that while young people are willing to respect religious identity, they do not show respect for religiosity: religious commitment and behaviour are often viewed as 'odd' and there is, it can be argued, a need to 'normalise' religious behaviour, without suppressing pupils' critical engagement with religions, beliefs and practices.

⁵ The information in this paragraph is from Prof Adam Dinham's evidence: See <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

⁶ This is Prof Adam Dinham's phrase. ⁷

This was evidence given by Dr Julia Ipgrave: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

This is connected to worrying evidence about the link between religion and bullying in schools. In a 2012 survey, young people who agreed with the statement that at school 'I am bullied because of my religion' included 42% of Sikh pupils, 32% of Jewish pupils, 23% of Muslim pupils and 11% of Christian pupils. This was manifested in a number of ways, one of which was intolerance of religiosity. It was acceptable, for example to identify as a Christian as long as that didn't include attendance at church. The strong message that came across was: if you were religious it was better to keep it quiet in school, because you might get teased, treated differently or bullied.

There are whole-school strategies to deal with bullying but the inclusion of religion and belief as protected characteristics in the Public Sector Equality Duty means that RE teachers can play a specific role in challenging bullying, not least through raising their colleagues' knowledge and understanding of these areas. A linked issue was raised about intra-religious conflict and the responsibility schools have to try to address this specific question. It cannot be separated from religious bullying and discrimination nor from the use of the Internet and social media in negative ways such as spreading biased and ill-informed comment. (This is not to doubt, of course, that there are many benefits in their use.)

A further issue with regard to religion was raised in relation to the media with their prevailing view of religion as being characterised by anxiety: about moral absolutism (sex), abuse of power (children and women) and violence (9/11 and 7/7), and there is a need to consider this in relation to RE. Linked to this is the massive change in how young people access, use and share information. The use of the internet and social media raises specific issues for religious educators about the quality of information about religions and worldviews that are instantly available to students, often made more difficult by teachers' own lack of familiarity with such media. There was a call for a greater emphasis on media literacy for both teachers and their students with a focus on developing a deeper critical engagement with the information, its provenance and its intentions.⁷ An interesting example of work with young people was provided in which they were taught how to make their own conspiracy theory video which was then shown to their friends. The latter were convinced and had to be told that it was fabricated nonsense. Enabling a critical and discerning use of media is an important educational priority.

If teachers are to address these and other related questions, there is an urgent need for collaboration across the RE spectrum so that the work of academic researchers is made accessible to teachers, who then need additional training and support to enable them to deal with these complex and current issues in the classroom.

All of this links directly with the findings of the first APPG on RE inquiry on teacher supply and training (APPG, 2013) which quoted an Ofsted finding:

- One of the weakest aspects of RE was the provision of continuing professional development, which was inadequate in nearly four in 10 schools visited. It was good or better in only three in 10 schools (Ofsted 2010:25).

Acquiring knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews is already a considerable challenge for many teachers; awareness of their rapidly changing nature in a global context adds another layer of difficulty. The RE Council and its member organisations, the proposed new regional 'hubs' and the Expert Advisory Group for RE have a considerable

⁷ See the evidence presented by Jamie Bartlett:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

task on their hands to support teachers. **There is an urgent need for political support for initial and continuing professional training for teachers of RE.**

Education

'What is the purpose of education?' was a question put to the inquiry for consideration.⁸ There were three suggested answers:

First, an intellectual or qualification purpose, the area of education which is concerned to introduce the child to the intellectual history of human kind and which provides students with relevant qualifications. The numbers of students taking RE and RS examinations have increased exponentially in recent years and there is a body of knowledge that is contained within syllabuses and examination specifications. This purpose is one of the reasons that RE is funded by public money and it can be seen to make a significant impact on students' school results and therefore on their life opportunities. The inquiry received evidence that some groups of students can benefit especially from examination courses in RE/RS: in Hampshire, for example, a narrower attainment gap is observed for children in receipt of free school meals sitting GCSE RE when compared with some other subjects. At a school in Tower Hamlets it was found that the percentages of students from minority ethnic groups choosing RE as a GCSE option was higher than white students: around 68% for Black and Pakistani or Bangladeshi-heritage students compared to 55% of white students. Such evidence can be used to promote the role RE can play in enabling pupil's academic achievement.

The second purpose of education is nurture into the social and civic life of the nation and in relation to identity. Again, these are inseparable from the purpose of RE but the subject is not unique in this respect, rather it is complementary to other cognate subject areas, such as Citizenship and Personal Social and Health Education. As part of this nurturing of young people, a number of presenters emphasised the need for critical engagement with the material being studied. That will include challenging conformity, the content of public discourse and media representation of it. The debate about British Values is one example of this.

The third purpose of education – and one that is perhaps more disputed - is child-centred. This can only take place when there is a whole-school commitment to child-centred education, where the values of the school are developed, articulated and owned by the school community. This links closely to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and while this is an area inspected by Ofsted,⁹ there is evidence from elsewhere that there is much yet to be done if teachers are to understand how to fulfil this part of their professional duties.¹⁰

The importance of strong leadership was stressed by presenters, if schools are to fulfil their nurturing function towards pupils and the community. Pupils cannot be thought of as separate from their families and the ideal would be for mutually respectful collaboration between schools and their communities.

⁸ See the evidence of Patrician Hannam

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

⁹ Though this applies only to schools and not to Further Education Colleges

¹⁰ See for example, http://www.thersa.org/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1540758/Schools-with-soul-REPORT.pdf

Religious Education

Drawing together now the first two terms to be examined, religion and education, questions are raised about religious education, particularly in relation to its purpose.

- What is RE for?
- How many purposes can it fulfil?
- What has religion to do with cohesion, or security, or diversity, and why should teaching about religion be concerned with such things?
- If we are trying to educate to bring about cohesion, why is it RE that should bear this burden?
- Don't other subjects such as maths and languages have an equal responsibility?
- What of the other aims and purposes of RE?

The purposes of RE were summarised by one of the evidence givers as: the development of skills in understanding and appraising religious beliefs; discerning the difference between valuable and harmful aspects of religions; appreciating the facets of religions without necessarily subscribing to them; and making reasonable accommodation between different and valid views and requirements. That includes understanding the pressures in every religion to maintain its heritage but also pressures to reinterpret that heritage as well as the pressures to engage in what opponents call extremism and fundamentalism – in every tradition.¹¹

The APPG inquiry identified a number of criteria that need to be met if RE is to be effective, not least in relation to community relations. Reference was made to breadth and balance in the curriculum; the need to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews; an increase in religious literacy – language and concepts – for both teachers and pupils, to enable depth of understanding and informed engagement with religions and beliefs.

Religious literacy was a topic that a number of speakers emphasised, drawing attention to the gap that currently exists, not only in schools but in public discourse: there is a 'lamentable quality of conversation about religion, just when we need it more than ever'.¹² RE has not always engaged sufficiently with the socio-political dimensions of religions and beliefs, as Ofsted pointed out in its report in 2007.¹³ This is a huge challenge for RE and it is not only attitudinal. We should not underestimate the cognitive and linguistic challenges the study of religion poses to young people with little or no experience of religions; to them RE often appears too complicated, foreign or just 'weird'. It was claimed in evidence that RE that helps to bridge the religious literacy gap is the RE that makes religion exciting and that normalises it.¹⁴

The vast majority of respondents made a strong link between schools teaching about different religions and peaceful coexistence between those religions. RE lessons can provide a safe space for discussing potentially contentious religious topics. This was exemplified

¹¹ See Robin Richardson's evidence:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

¹² Prof Dinham quoting Grace Davie (1994)

¹³ See Making Sense of Religion (2007,7)

¹⁴ See Dr Julia Ipgrave's evidence: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10december-2013>

through evidence about the *REsilience* project which had been initiated through the previous government to provide mentor support to teachers to develop confidence and competence. The inquiry was reminded of words of the Toledo Guiding Principles: Those who teach about religions and beliefs ... need to have the knowledge, attitude and skills to teach about religions and beliefs in a fair and balanced way ... so that they can ... help students interact with each other in sensitive and respectful ways.¹⁵

There is also the question of the changing nature of religion and belief and how RE can respond to this challenge: 'The real religious landscape and the one imagined by policy and theory have a huge gap between them'.¹⁶ This will require work on the part of curriculum and syllabus developers, resource producers, professional development providers, senior managers and subject specialists, as well as collaboration across the RE spectrum so that knowledge and understanding can be shared to everyone's benefit.

Community

The four definitions of 'community' used by Ofsted were considered: the school community, the community within which the school is located, the UK community and the global community.¹⁹ The concept of community/ies though can – should - also be understood in relation to individuals and the communities to which they belong: ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, regional, local as well as sporting, leisure and other *ad hoc* communities. Each of these links to identity/ies and to questions that need to be explored as young people and their teachers work together, learning about themselves as well as about the world in which we all live.

The concept of community cannot be separated from the concept of society and one of our evidence givers reminded us that in British law there is a requirement not only to promote the spiritual, moral and social development of children but also **of society**.¹⁷ This leads to a fundamental question which is highly relevant for everyone involved in decision making in education: What kind of society do we want? One of our speakers summed up her vision:

There is joy in celebrating our common humanity: by being alongside one another in things that matter to my friends, neighbours and strangers; by struggling together against racism, oppression, poverty, social injustice, fear, ignorance and anything that degrades human beings.¹⁸

There are at least two questions that arise from this. First, there is the issue of schools with a religious character, and their role in promoting good community relations. When issues such as extremism and social segregation are discussed, faith schools are frequently cited as part of the problem. Are they part of the solution? Two of our speakers defended the role of faith communities in education. There is the argument that the faith community as a whole is directly involved financially and in governance, determining the ethos of the school and the

¹⁵ This was quoted by Lesley Prior:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

¹⁶ Prof Adam Dinham: <http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december2013> 19

This was included in Deborah Weston's evidence (ibid)

¹⁷ This reminder was given by Dr Marius Felderhof

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

¹⁸ This was stated by Aliya Azam (ibid)

nature and character of the RE syllabus. This active involvement ensures that faith schools are never isolated from but responsive to local needs, expectations and ambitions.¹⁹ With specific reference to Church of England voluntary aided schools, we heard that there is a duty for them to serve their local community: the rich and poor, the more and less able, the more and less 'religious', the Christian and non-Christian.²⁰

There is a second question about identity and community: how we preserve what is important to people about their identity as members of a religious minority while they are joining and adapting to the wider majority community.²¹ A related question is the obverse of this: how can the 'silent majority' of young people who are not actively religious relate to the more easily identified and acknowledged religious and ethnic minorities? This is a question for all schools to explore as they serve their community/ies and as they attempt to articulate what it means in their own situation. Such conversations will include the exploration of the values that lie at the heart of the school, its life and its ethos and it is a conversation in which pupils, parents and the wider community will also be involved. One of the most inspiring aspects of the inquiry as a whole was the contributions made by two groups of Young Ambassadors whose vision of and commitment to good community relations and RE's role in promoting was truly impressive. Listening to all pupils, not just Young Ambassadors, is essential.

Relations

The phrase 'good community relations' is included in the title of this inquiry but what is not entirely clear is whether 'community relations' is synonymous with 'community cohesion', whether 'community cohesion' is the same as 'social cohesion', whether 'cohesion' and 'integration' mean the same and what, if any, is the significance of nomenclature.

Educationists know that the duty to promote community cohesion remains on the statute book even though Ofsted no longer inspects how far schools meet that duty. Speakers offered some insight into this complex area. First, mention was made of Robert Putnam's work and the need for 'bonding' within communities so that they have internal strength and 'bridging' across communities to prevent in-group loyalty from becoming out-group antagonism.²² And we were reminded that we cannot undermine the importance of group mentality and solidarity, not least for followers of religious and belief groups.²³ A number of people gave evidence on the importance of linking and dialogue between groups and the ways in which understanding and community relations can thereby be improved, and not only for pupils. Encounter is no less crucial for teachers because it is hard for them to model the qualities of intercultural understanding with their pupils if they lack the opportunities for learning from encounter with difference.²⁷

¹⁹ Dr Marius Felderhof's evidence (see above, note 19)

²⁰ This was in Jane Chipperton's evidence, quoting Prof David Ford:

<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/appg/meetings-of-the-appg/meeting-of-10-december-2013>

²¹ Aliya Azam asked this question

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.01.27_tra.pdf

²² These were the words of Dr Norman Richardson:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24_-_t.pdf

²³ Jamie Bartlett's evidence:

http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/Oral_Evidence_Session_2014.02.24__t.pdf 27

Evidence from Dr Norman Richardson (ibid)

Community Relations

It is too easy to assume that encounter between groups will automatically lead to tolerance. The experiences of Northern Ireland and in English towns along 'the M62 corridor', such as Bradford and Oldham, may suggest otherwise. It was disturbing to learn that the education community and the

Department for Education have been non-compliant with regard to duties set out in the Equality Act (2010).²⁴ At the time of writing, Ofsted does not check compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and, as we know, they have been told not to inspect schools' compliance with the duty to promote community cohesion. In the wake of the 'Trojan Horse' furore, it is perhaps time to suggest that such decisions might be re-examined.

Whether or not Islamophobia was an issue in the Trojan Horse affair, it is a major problem in our society in relation to equality and to community cohesion and it presents particular problems in RE. It cannot be ignored in the teaching of Islam nor can it be assumed that simply learning about Islam will be of any benefit.

There is a naïve and simplifying view that the solution to Islamophobia, Muslim hostility or religion is to teach people about Islam.²⁵ And, in reference to the English Defence League, we were told that they would claim not to be

Islamophobia because phobias are irrational whereas they claim to possess evidence from the Internet and other sources that demonstrate that their fear is anything but irrational. How can RE teachers respond to these challenges? How can schools work more effectively with their communities? With parents?

There are some who remind us that RE isn't just or mainly about community relations and there is truth in that but there are areas of the RE curriculum where stereotypical attitudes and prejudices will prevent open-ended, open-minded engagement with what is being studied. That is not to say that young people will not be critical of or disagree with what they are learning but the learning process should not be hampered by pre-existing biases. These have to be addressed and this may be an uncomfortable and challenging process for teachers.

What this means is that RE is in a unique position because some of the key questions about community relations are intrinsic to the content of our subject. It does not mean that we have to bear the whole burden of challenging misconceptions and misinformation: the whole school has the responsibility to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Promoting good community relations and developing SMSC are inseparable and RE is one of the junctures when they naturally combine. Why would RE teachers (or any teacher) **not** wish to promote better community relations?

Final thoughts

It has become commonplace to talk of 'multiple identities' and there is a considerable literature available on this. It is possible to see each aspect of identity related to a

²⁴ Evidence from Robin Richardson (ibid)

²⁵ [Robin Richardson](#),
Ibid

community: each of us has many facets and many groups with which we identify. Nonetheless, to see others and ourselves as simply the sum of the labels that are applicable to us is to be guilty of a reductionism: we are more than this. And this is where religious education can move discussion of identity and community to a deeper level. Identity is an existential concept and by exploring it with children and young people, we can open them up to the uniqueness (and for some, the sanctity) of human beings. This is something that religions and worldviews address in their analysis of and solutions to existential questions and so RE can take rather mundane notions of identity and move them in two directions: a deeper understanding and a more spiritual view of what it is to be human.

RE's contribution to community relations is not just about our subject content or the skills that we help develop: it is in dealing with the existential questions to which religions and worldviews offer the answers that we can really develop young people as skilled intercultural navigators and champions of equalities, human rights and social justice.

There is also a sense in which it could be argued that RE also has 'multiple identities': there are many disciplines within our area of study and many facets to our work, we have varying and sometimes competing our aims and purposes, we have a range of content and skills and different values we work towards, we have different communities and interest groups and a wider range of schools than ever before. There is room for all of us with our differing priorities.

It may be that this metaphor is one that would be useful in promoting cohesion within difference in the world of RE as a whole.

**Joyce
Miller
2014.**

References:

APPG on RE (2013) *RE: The Truth Unmasked* (London, RE Council)

Davie G (1994) *Religion in Britain since 1945 Believing without belonging* (Oxford, Blackwell)

Ofsted (2007) *Making Sense of Religion* (London, Ofsted)

Spencer N and Welden H (2012) *Post-religious Britain?: Faith of the faithless* (London, Theos). Available at:

<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Post%20Religious%20Britain%20pdf.pdf>

Woodhead L and Catto R (eds) (2012) *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (London, Routledge)

The changing profile of Thurrock in relation to affiliation to religions and beliefs

Table one sets out the results of the census in 2001 and 2011 comparing the percentage of the population in terms of their answer to the question about their religion or belief

Table 1

Faith in Thurrock	Thurrock 2001 Census	Thurrock 2011 census	UK 2001	UK 2011
Christian	75.09%	63.30%	71.10%	59.30%
Buddhist	0.17%	0.40%	0.30%	0.40%
Hindu	0.55%	0.70%	1.10%	1.50%
Jewish	0.17%	0.10%	0.50%	0.50%
Muslim	1.07%	2.00%	3.00%	4.80%
Sikh	0.70%	0.80%	0.60%	0.80%
Other	0.21%	0.30%	0.30%	0.40%
No religion	15.51%	26.00%	14.80%	25.10%
Religion not stated	6.52%	6.30%	7.70%	7.20%

Green= greater than the national average Yellow=reflects national average Blue-smaller than the national average

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9 January 2019	ITEM: 8
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education	
Monitoring Provision for Religious Education in Thurrock Schools	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Deborah Weston: Associate Adviser for Religious Education	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills	
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

In order to discharge its legal duties, SACRE monitors provision for Religious Education in its local area where RE is delivered in accordance with the local Agreed Syllabus. Thurrock introduced a new Agreed Syllabus in 2016 and has conducted regular monitoring exercises to establish how effective the new syllabus has been in meeting its aim to raise standards of RE. At the last meeting of SACRE resolved to ask the associate adviser to undertake two monitoring actions:

1. To approach schools with a brief questionnaire to help them understand some of the choices schools have made concerning the use of the Agreed Syllabus and scheme of work.
2. To write letters to six schools where the data collected appeared to indicate there might be deficiencies in relation to their provision for RE.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE consider:

- the information collected to date (December 2018)
- any lessons learned from these responses
- Consider what action might be necessary to collect more responses

2. Introduction and Background

DfE guidance for Academies published [here](#) explains that Academy Funding Agreements require these schools to make one of three choices about their provision for Religious Education. This questionnaire aims to collect information about that choice in Thurrock Academies.

The rapid turnover of subject leaders in primary schools means that not all teachers appear to have access to the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus and schemes of work. The questionnaire is an opportunity to inform schools about the available resources.

To comply with the School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012, all schools including academies and free schools must publish the content of the religious education curriculum for each academic year on their school website.¹ and ²

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The number of responses received both to the questionnaire and letters is disappointing and SACRE will need to consider its options in trying to collect this information. E.g. abandoning the questionnaire and letters, repeating the requests, for example for the questionnaire the Headteacher Bulletin, resending the letters (perhaps copying in the Chair of the Governing Board), informing schools by another method of the request for this information.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 One of the responsibilities of a SACRE is to monitor provision for RE to be given in accordance with its Agreed Syllabus.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 the Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;
- publishes an Annual Report of its work;
 - offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
 - monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online>

Finance Manager Corporate Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the analysis of the data collected through this exercise will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

The legal duties on the advisory council are set out in s391 of the Education Act 1996. The main one is to advise the local authority on such matters connected with the religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools which do not have a religious character and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus as the authority may refer to the council or as the council may see fit.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren.**
(Community Development & Equalities Manager)

The aim of this review is to collect information about the provision for RE in Thurrock, to address concerns and to celebrate success. Higher standards in the teaching of RE will help schools to fulfil their statutory duty to promote community cohesion and to encourage better respect and tolerance for those with different religions and beliefs.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8.0 Appendices to the report

8.1 Appendix A – Questionnaire and Answers

8.2 Appendix B – Letters sent to schools

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix A

1. What is the full name of your school?

3 responses

Quarry Hill Academy
Giffards Primary School
Aveley Primary School

2. What is the name of the person completing this form?

3 responses

Christina Eldred
Nicola James
Nicola Shadbolt

3. What is the role of the person completing this form?

3 responses

RE Co-ordinator
Assistant Headteacher
Headteacher

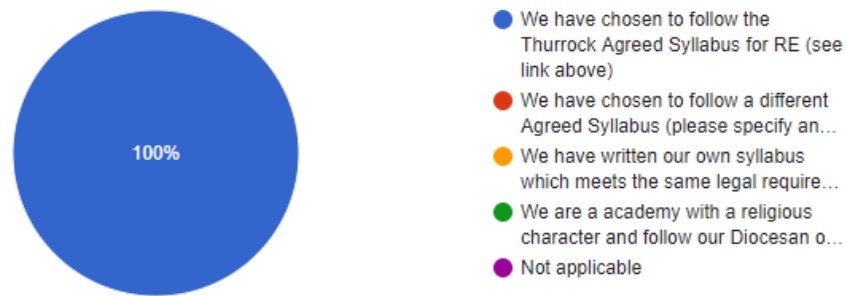
4. If your school is a LA maintained school, do all teachers of RE have access to the statutory Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education? <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/religious-education/syllabus-for-religious-education>

2 responses



5. If your school is an Academy, which of the options stipulated by the DfE through <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/r/re%20and%20collective%20wors>

2 responses



6. If your school in an Academy and you have chosen to adopt a syllabus for RE other than the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus, please specify which one and send a link to document below.

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

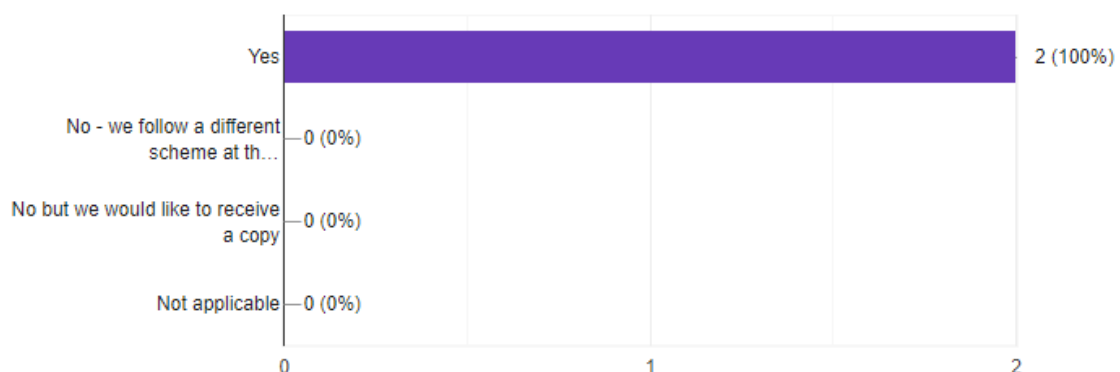
7. Link to non-Thurrock Syllabus for RE where applicable (see above)

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

8. If your school includes the primary phase and has chosen to adopt the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus, do you follow the Thurrock Scheme of Work for primary schools?

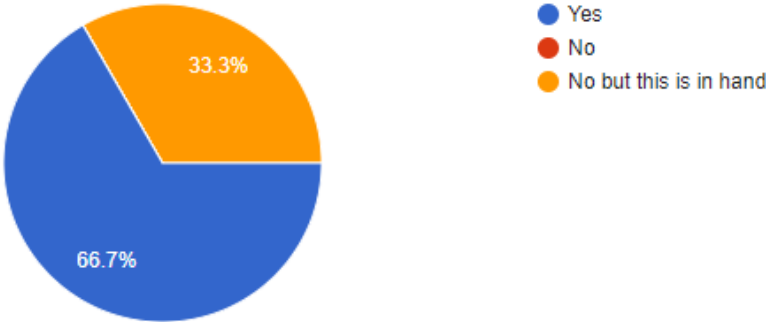
2 responses



9. Have you published the content of your school curriculum in each academic year for every subject, including Religious Education even if it is taught as part of another subject or subjects, or is called something else?



3 responses



10. Other comments or questions for SACRE

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Appendix B

Letters were sent to the following schools:

The Hathaway	no response
Gateway	response see below
Aveley Primary	response see below
William Edwards	response see below
Graham James	no response
Arthur Bugler	no response

From: N Shadbolt [<mailto:nshadbolt@aveleyprimary.thurrock.sch.uk>]
Sent: 10 December 2018 15:08
To: Buck, Sarah
Subject: RE: Religious Education - letters to schools from SACRE

Please forward to Deborah Weston – [Sacre](#)

Thank-you for your comments following completion of the RE survey.

Aveley Primary has adopted Cornerstones curriculum for foundation subjects – but not RE, where we follow the Thurrock agreed syllabus. An outline of the syllabus is on the school website in the curriculum tab – it is listed at the end of the Year group overviews – RE overview. Aveley Primary is joining the Catalyst Academy chain and will continue to follow the Thurrock agreed Syllabus.

I hope that this answers your questions.

Kind regards

[N.Shadbolt](#)

N. Shadbolt
Headteacher Aveley Primary
01708 865868



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William Edwards School

'Inspirational learning with a strong sporting ethos'

HEADTEACHER: MR S BELL

20th November 2019

Rev John Guest
Via Email: gof4god@aol.com

Dear Rev Guest,

I am writing in response to your letter which I received on the 16th November via Sue Lamkin at Thurrock Council. Your letter indicates that you wanted a reply by the 10th October but clearly this was not possible given when I have received it.

I am grateful for you contacting me in order to seek clarification about our RE provision. You are correct in your assertion that it is hard to draw conclusions from the publically available information but I wanted to reassure you that as a practicing OfSTED inspector with a specialism in the curriculum, I am perhaps more aware than most of the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum offer and clearly RE provision is central to this.

Our RE offer has not changed in the last five years and is outlined below:

- RE is taught to all pupils on the curriculum as a distinct subject in years 7, 8 & 9. We follow the locally agreed syllabus.
- In addition to this, all year groups have 'focus days' during the year when the normal timetable is collapsed. SMSC themes are the focus of these days and RE plays an equal part in this offer. This is also the case with our daily (35 minute) tutor programme delivered to all pupils.
- Unusually for a large Secondary School we also have a weekly whole school assembly. This is used as an opportunity to further deliver aspects of Religious Education. Our Head of RE is included on the delivery team for this.
- We offer GCSE RE each year to pupils in Years 10 & 11. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts over a number of years, numbers remain low. However, due to its importance, RE is the only subject on the curriculum I will allow to run even if uptake is low.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not follow the GCSE course still receive significant RE Education as a result of the provision outlined above.

Once again, may I thank you for seeking clarification of our offer. I firmly believe that our curriculum is exceptionally broad and balanced and we work hard to ensure that Religious Education is an important part of that. Religious Education, spirituality, diversity and different belief systems are a crucially important part of our work to educate young people at William Edwards.

Many thanks again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Bell
Headteacher

GMN/JJA

26 November 2018

Rev. John Guest
Chair of Thurrock SACRE

Dear Reverend Guest



RE: DELIVERY OF THE SACRE CURRICULUM AT THE GATEWAY ACADEMY

Thank you for your letter regarding the delivery of the SACRE curriculum at the Gateway Academy.

There appears to be some confusion regarding the figures and curriculum taught at the Academy. We recognise the importance of delivering high quality Religious Education and are fully committed to ensuring that we include it fully in our curriculum throughout the students' time at the Academy.

It is correct that we did teach Religious Education alongside History and Geography up until July 2017, although this was taught with distinct lessons for each subject. In September 2017 we changed this to separate disciplines and amended our Curriculum Policy appropriately. We continue to teach Religious Education as a discrete subject and have every intention to continue to do so. Over 95% of The Gateway Academy students sat a Religious Studies examination in 2018 and it is with great delight that I inform you that the students are now achieving grades above national average. We continue to deliver the course to all students and the content covers all aspects of the agreed curriculum.

We believe that every child at the Gateway benefits from the delivery of a Religious Education and have continuously strived to deliver high quality provision. In September 2016 we were fortunate to employ an experienced Head of Religious Education who is passionate about the subject and has further enhanced the profile and delivery to all students. As a result, students have many opportunities to explore the importance of Religious Education beyond the curriculum, including visits to, for example, Westminster Abbey - Symbols of Worship Tour and The London Central Mosque. We also regularly have a number of external visitors come into the Academy from different religious faiths to speak to our students at assemblies etc.

I have included a copy of our Curriculum Policy and the curriculum overview of the programme of study for you to look through and hope that this will help to clarify your concerns. We would welcome any feedback and be more than happy to discuss this further with you or any members of the Thurrock SACRE.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grainne McLaughlin', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Mrs G McLaughlin
HEAD OF SCHOOL

The Gateway Academy,

| Tel: 01375 489000 | admin.gateway@theglc.org.uk |

ing upon our best

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9 January 2019	ITEM: 9
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education	
Annual Report 2017- 2018	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Deborah Weston: Associate Adviser for Religious Education	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills	
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report presents the Annual Report to members of SACRE for approval

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

- That SACRE accept this report as an accurate record of its work for the period September 2016 – July 2018
- Requests that the Director of Education, writes to all schools to remind them of their statutory duties/ contractual obligations to provide religious education to all pupils on the school roll
- Requests that the school improvement team include a review of schools’ provision for RE and Collective Worship as part of the annual conversations

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 It is a legal requirement that SACRE submit an annual report of its activities to the local authority.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Members are requested to accept, amend or reject the report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 In order that SACRE fulfils its statutory duty to publish an annual report and to advise the LA on RE given in accordance with the agreed syllabus, and on

matters related to its functions, whether in response to a referral from the LA or as it sees fit.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis:

- publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

**Implications verified by: Kay Goodacre
Finance Manager Corporate Finance**

There are no financial implications for this report.

7.2 Legal

**Implications verified by: Lucinda Bell
Education Lawyer**

SACRE is asked to accept, reject or amend the report. S391 of the Education Act 1996 requires SACRE to publish a report as to the exercise of its functions and any action taken by representative groups on the council during the last year. The section states that “The council’s report shall in particular—

- a) specify any matters in respect of which the council have given advice to the authority,
- b) broadly describe the nature of the advice given, and
- c) where any such matter was not referred to the council by the authority, give the council’s reasons for offering advice on that matter.”

The Committee is requested to accept the report, and also that it makes two decisions that are related to the report findings.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
(Community Development & Equalities Manager)

Although there are no direct diversity implications, the Annual Report demonstrates how the work of SACRE continues to promote an understanding of different religions in education therefore promoting cohesion.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8.0 Appendices to the report

8.1 **Appendix A** – annual report of the Thurrock standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE) for 2017 - 2018

8.2 **Appendix B** – The membership of Thurrock SACRE 2016-18

8.3 **Appendix C** – SACRE discussion of National Developments in RE

8.4 **Appendix D** – Standards in RE in Thurrock Schools

Report Author:

Deborah Weston, OBE

Associate Adviser for RE

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE THURROCK STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) FOR 2017 - 2018

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

Foreword by the Chair of SACRE – Rev. John Guest

Pending

The membership of Thurrock SACRE 2016-18

Committee A

Mrs S Lawson – Free Church Member

Mrs Shepherd – Roman Catholic Member

Vacancy – Jewish Member

M A Rashid – Muslim Member

Ms A Ahmed – Muslim Member

Mr B Gill – Sikh Member

Vacancy – Hindu Member

Mr P Anderson – House Church Member

Dr O Soleye – Pentecostal Member

Vacancy – Buddhist Member

Committee B

Rev. John Guest – Chair (from July 2014) Church of England Member

Mrs Mary Taylor – Church of England Member

David Bates – Church of England Member

Committee C

Angela Jellicoe – Teacher representative

Paul Griffiths – Headteacher representative

Richard Epps – Headteacher representative

Hayley Gillman - Teacher representative

Nicola Fawell - Teacher representative

Committee D

Councillor Kerin

Councillor Gupta

Councillor Ojetola

SACRE Meetings Held

The following SACRE meetings were held during the reporting period:

- 19 April 2017
- 5 September 2017
- 22 November 2017
- 30 January 2018
- 18 July 2018

All meetings were held at the Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Thurrock, Essex

SACRE discussion of National Developments in RE

National Association of SACREs (NASACRE)

Thurrock SACRE was pleased to continue to be involved in this association and to discuss issues raised at the Annual General Meeting. The NASACRE newsletters provided useful information to inform agendas and support for schools.

SACRE took part in The Big NASACRE survey. SACRE later heard that the data gathered from this survey was used to inform the Commission on RE. As the remit of the commission was to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for religious education, it was essential that evidence from SACREs was considered.

State of the Nation Report and implications for Thurrock

Members were concerned to read of the decline in the levels of provision of RE in England measured by the school workforce and GCSE data. SACRE heard that schools in Thurrock were also facing significant challenges in recruiting specialist teachers of RE for secondary schools and that this was contributing to the decline in levels of provision. Headteachers were rightly concerned about the potential impact on school standards of using teachers with other specialisms to teach RE. SACRE members asked if the teaching school alliances that served the area could training places for teachers of RE. They were disappointed that alliances in Havering and Essex had been allocated RE places, none appeared to be available in Thurrock itself.

The Commission on RE interim report

SACRE discussed the interim findings of the interim report and how this related to RE in Thurrock. Members noted the following key issues in the report:

- A proposal for a national entitlement for RE
- The need to hold schools to account for the provision and quality of RE
- A renewed and expanded role for SACRES
- The legal status of right of withdrawal and the challenges of selective withdrawal
- A National Plan for improving teaching and learning in RE

RE support for Thurrock Schools

In order to support the raising of standards of RE in Thurrock Schools, SACRE explored several initiatives.

Religious Education Quality Mark

SACRE heard that the RE Quality Mark had been developed to celebrate high quality religious education and provided community schools, faith schools and academies with a framework to capture good practice.

It was commented that the award encouraged the development and celebration of school wide commitment to excellent teaching and learning in religious education. Within the award there were three award levels: bronze, silver and gold.

Schools applying for the REQM were asked to highlight where they thought they meet the criteria. After applying for the REQM an assessor will visit the school, interview learners and meet the subject leader and a member of the senior leadership team.

Members heard that the Ockendon Academy had recently been awarded the silver award within the programme. It was explained that the award was evidence based and a visiting assessor evaluated the evidence that all criteria had been met.

It was commented that the qualification was positive on both schools and for SACRE and it was agreed that the Headteacher bulletin and subject leader mailing list should be used to congratulate Ockendon Academy and encourage other schools with engage with the award.

Acts of Worship

SACRE has a legal duty to monitor provision for collective worship in schools in its local area. A discussion on this topic raised the following points:

- many schools found the legal duties surrounding the act of collective worship challenging both on practical and philosophical level.
- it was common for schools to assume that assemblies and acts of worship were synonymous, but this was an error since not all assemblies provide an opportunity for worship
- Some schools, especially secondary schools struggled to meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship in a crowded school timetable. Schools reported that it required quite a lot of time to be able to do something meaningful within collective worship, and so preferred less frequent sessions.
- Most teachers were not trained to lead collective worship and so many of them were reluctant to be involved.
- Members felt that collective worship should not be lost in school life, especially as it provided an opportunity to quiet reflection during a busy school day. Others stated that children needed an opportunity to worship and reflect if they wish too.
- Several schools in Thurrock provided excellent opportunities for prayer and reflection. Holy Cross Primary School had a prayer garden which was inspired by a school trip to Aylesford, Kent where children completed the Rosary Walk. Following a trip with a Year 6 class the children had asked if they could have their own peace garden. The children created their garden with stones painted with word such as Love and Peace, running water, the sun, moon, stars to represent God's garden. It was commented that the garden meant a lot to the children as it gave them somewhere to go and reflect. St Clere's School also has a prayer space.

Youth SACRE report to SACRE

As part of their monitoring work, SACRE decided to invite representatives of the Youth Cabinet to attend a SACRE meeting. Members informed the representatives that had invited the Youth Cabinet to their meeting as they felt it was important to seek their views about their experiences of Religious Education in Schools and the importance of Religious Education in Thurrock today.

Provision:

Members of the Youth Cabinet informed SACRE that two of them attended St Clere's and one Grays Convent. It was explained that at St Clere's, Religious Education was compulsory for Years 7 – 9 and could be taken as an option for years 10 and 11, topics taught included, similarities and differences between different religions and worldviews, customs and

practices within faiths and in the later years, the exploration of religious and moral issues such as life after death and different responses to blood transfusion.

In contrast, Religious Education at Grays Convent was compulsory for all years and all students studied for a full course GCSE. The focus of their GCSE was Mark's Gospel and Christian responses to religious and moral issues.

Acts of Worship:

The Youth Cabinet representative from St Clere's School reported that there was a prayer space for children which was open to all but particularly used by Muslim pupils for their prayers. The pupils from Grays Convent reported attending daily worship and Mass.

Members of the Youth Cabinet remarked they remembered a local reverend attending to speak to pupils in a whole school assembly and or mediation.

APPENDIX D

Standards in RE in Thurrock Schools

School Workforce data 2017

The table below includes the hours allocated to RE based on the data the school submitted to the DfE as part of the school census together with GCSE results and entry levels.

School	Type	Percentage of timetable hours for RE							GCSE		Ofsted	Results at GCSE 2017		
		Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	% of year 11 entered full	% year 11 entered		Percentage A*-C FC	Percentage A*-C SC	Percentage (double entry)
Gable Hall School	Academy converter	2.7	1.6	3.2	1.4	0	0	0	24.2	0	Requires improvement July 2018	63.8		63.8
Grays Convent High School	Voluntary aided school	7.5	7.5	7.4	11	8.5	0	0	94.7	3.5	Good Nov 2017	85.2	75	84.8
Harris Academy Chafford Hundred	Academy converter	0	0	0	0	1.5	2.9	3	12.2	0	Outstanding Nov 2011	77.3		77.3
St Clare's School	Academy converter	4.8	4.9	2.7	2.3	0	0	0	0	28.6	Good Sept 2014 Inspected 27 th Nov 2018 – outcome to be confirmed		87.7	87.7
The Ockendon Academy	Academy converter	7.3	7.4	6.9	6.9	7.1	6.7	0	100	0	Good Feb 2014	41.3		41.3
William Edwards School	Academy converter	0	4.2	4.1	0	1	0	0	3	0	Outstanding	71.4		71.4
The Hathaway	Academy sponsor	0	0	0	1.9	2.9	0	0	13.7	0	Good	47.1		47.1

Academy	led										June 2015			
The Gateway Academy	Academy sponsor led	0	0	7	15	3.7	0	0	74.8	0	Requires improvement May 2017	49.2		49.2
Ormiston Park Academy	Academy sponsor led	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Good April 2017			
Hassenbrook Academy	Academy converter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Requires improvement May 2018			

GCSE

GCSE ENTRIES	2014 Full Course % Roll Entry	2015 Full Course % Roll Entry	2016 Full Course % Roll Entry	2017 Full Course % Roll Entry	2018 Full Course % Roll Entry
Gable Hall School	6%	6%		24%	27%
Grays Convent High School	87%	94%	95%	95%	86%
Harris Academy Chafford Hundred	14%	24%	17%	12%	13%
Hassenbrook Academy	8%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Hathaway Academy	74%	96%	13%	14%	14%
Ormiston Park Academy	8%	7%	1%	0%	0%
St. Clere's School	86%	54%	12%		7%
The Gateway Academy	7%	26%	58%	75%	36%
The Ockendon Academy	99%	100%	99%	100%	100%

William Edwards School	10%	9%		3%	3%
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GCSE RESULTS	2014 Full Course A*-C	2015 Full Course A*-C	2016 Full Course A*-C	2017 Full Course A*-C	2018 Full Course 9-4
National Average	72%	72%	72%	71.3%	72%
Thurrock Average	67%	65%	62%	62%	73.5%
Gable Hall School	93%	64%	65%	64%	67%*
Grays Convent High School	81%	88%	78%	85%	75%
Harris Academy Chafford Hundred	96%	93%	83%	77%	100%
Hassenbrook Academy	42%	58%	No entries	No entries	No entries
Hathaway Academy	62%	47%	78%	47%	46%
Ormiston Park Academy	57%	67%	No entries	No entries	No entries
St. Clere's School	44%	51%	96%	92%	88%
The Gateway Academy	92%	67%	42%	49%	87%
The Ockendon Academy	65%	55%	54%	41%	45%
William Edwards School	42%	57%	62%	71%	100%

*These students sat their GCSE in year 10. There are no hours of RE in year 11

Commentary

1. Gable Hall:

- a. Entered 27% of the year 11 cohort for GCSE and achieved good results, just below the national average for the course.
- b. The analysis of the school website conducted by SACRE indicates that RE is delivered for, for “100 minutes in year 7, 50 minutes in year 8 and 100 minutes in year 9” This is a good allocation of time for a broad study of Religions and worldviews.
- c. However, the website also states that, “Towards the end of Year 8, students in Violet, Indigo and Yellow start a GCSE in Religious Education by following the fast track route which is covered in two years.” *SACRE were concerned that students were studying a course designed for students more than a year older, that their potential to make the maximum amount of progress was reduced by early entry and by reporting zero hours of RE in year 11 was suggesting that they might not be fulfilling the terms of its funding agreement. SACRE has asked the school improvement team to investigate*
- d. Furthermore, the website states, “Only students from 9 Violet, Indigo and Yellow will be passing their final GCSE exam at the end of year 10. There is no coursework requirement for this GCSE, just 2 end of year exams in May on two beliefs, teachings and practices of both religion as well as their ethics beliefs.”. This begs the question of what those students who are not in Violet, Indigo and Yellow receive in terms of provision for RE.
- e. SACRE notes that Ofsted has judged this school as requiring improvement and that the school is part of the ORTU Federation.

2. Grays Convent High School

- a. Enters almost all students for a full course GCSE and achieves results that are above the national average. The number of hours provided for RE follows Diocesan guidelines for a school with a Catholic Religious Character.

3. Harris Academy Chafford Hundred

- a. The school workforce data reported by the school suggests that there are no hours for RE in year 7,8 or 9 and year the school website includes long term plans for all three-year groups under the heading Humanities and RS KS3.
- b. Closer inspection of these plans suggests that there is no explicit teaching about religions and beliefs and that the Agreed Syllabus is not being followed. SACRE resolved to write to the school to enquire which syllabus is being followed and how the funding agreement is being met.

c. The entry figures for GCSE suggests there is a small option group that is achieving very good results for the full course GCSE; above the national average. However, there is no evidence on the website of RE in year 10 or 11 for students who do not opt for RS GCSE. SACRE *has asked the school improvement team to investigate*

4. St.Clere's School

- a. The school workforce data suggests that there is no provision for RE in year 11 which would be a breach of the academy funding agreement
- b. Likewise, the data suggests that only those students that opt for RE short course (28%) study the subject in year 9 and 10
- c. The outcomes for the GCSE short course for this group of students are outstanding, being significantly above the national average.
- d. Provision in the shortened key stage 3 covers a range of topics related to religions and beliefs but because GCSE begins in year 9, the academy can not be said to be following the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus. SACRE *has asked the school improvement team to investigate*

5. The Ockendon Academy

- a. The school workforce data suggests that there is a very good level of provision for RE at the academy.
- b. The number of entries and results at GCSE have steadily declined over recent years.

6. William Edwards School

- a. The school workforce data suggests there is no Religious Education provision in years 7 and 10. Year 7 follow a creative curriculum programme which commands four hours of curriculum time per week and includes Religious Education.
- b. The workforce data for year 10 is confusing however, since there were GCSE entries in 2017 which would suggest there was an option group on the timetable for key stage 4: years 10-11.
- c. SACRE was concerned about the level of provision and wrote to the Headteacher who replied stating that all students in Key Stage 4 receive RE through a series of focus days delivered throughout the year. SACRE was unconvinced that pupils would make the expected level of progress and *has asked the school improvement team to investigate*.

7. Hathaway Academy

- a. The Hathaway Academy reports no hours for RE in years 7,8 and 9.
- b. In 2015, almost the full year 11 cohort were entered for GCSE full course and achieved excellent results; above the national average. By 2016, this decision had been reversed and only a small option group were entered with significantly poorer results.
- c. SACRE were concerned about the level and standard of provision and wrote to the Headteacher. No reply has been received SACRE *has asked the school improvement team to investigate*.

8. The Gateway Academy

- a. The Gateway reports no hours for RE in years 7 and 8 but does make provision in years 9,10 and 11.

- b. Between 2016 and 2017, the proportion of the year 11 cohort entered for GCSE increased from 58% to 75% but the results remained significantly below the national average.
- c. SACRE was concerned that there appeared to be no provision for RE for those pupils that did not opt for RS at Key Stage 4 and about the standards achieved. The Chair wrote to the Headteacher accordingly.
- d. SACRE was delighted to learn through a reply from the Headteacher that an experienced Head of RE had been appointed by the Academy and that the lack of hours in year 7 and 8 could be explained by the fact that RE was taught alongside History and Geography prior to September 2017 but was now delivered a separate discipline. Over 95% of the Gateway students sat a RS examination in 2018 and are now achieving grades above the national average. The remaining issue is that there appears to be **no provision in year 11** and that early entry may be restricting pupils' opportunity to make even more progress.

9. Ormiston Park Academy

- a. The school workforce data appears to indicate that there is no provision for Religious Education in any school year.
- b. There were no GCSE entries in 2016 or 2017
- c. The school website here, reports that there is one lesson of CPRE in years 7-8 and two in years 9,10 and 11. SACRE could find no information published about the content of the curriculum as required by the [schools publication regulations](#).
- d. SACRE were concerned that the Academy appears to be in breach of its funding agreement and the Chair wrote to the Headteacher. **No reply was received. SACRE has asked the school improvement team to investigate**

10. Hassenbrook Academy

- a. The school workforce data appears to indicate that there is no provision for Religious Education in any school year however, there is RE content in the PRE/PSHE [curriculum map](#) though this does not follow the Agreed Syllabus nor appear to provide sufficient timetable time or content to meet the equivalent standards.
- b. There were no GCSE entries between 2016-18
- c. SACRE were concerned that the Academy might not be offering provision that meets the expected standards for RE and **SACRE has asked the school improvement team to investigate**. SACRE notes that the school is now part of the ORTU Federation.

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Work Programme

Committee: Standing Advisory Council Religious Education (SACRE)

Year: 2018/2019

Dates of Meeting: 18 July 2018, 17 October 2018 and 9 January 2019

Topic	Lead Officer
18 July 2018	
Collective Worship within Schools	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
Agreed Syllabus – The Future of SACRE	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
Work Programme	Democratic Services
17 October 2018	
The Commission on RE	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
Monitoring provision including school workforce data	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
Review of membership and attendance	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser

Work Programme

9 January 2019	
Relationships: (Academies, the Council, Governors, Communities of religion and belief, Thurrock work on Community Integration , NASACRE, Youth Cabinet, Regional Schools Commissioners)	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
The new OfSTED Framework Consultation	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser
Youth Cabinet	Deborah Weston, RE Adviser

Summer 2019:

- Standards and Achievements in Pilot Project on self-evaluation
- Academy decisions about Agreed Syllabus
- SACRE website
- Collective Worship
- Annual report including GCSE results 2018